

The Novelette in this No. is a fascinating story.

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WHEN SIR JOHN ENTERED HIS DRESSING-ROOM HE FOUND HIS WIFE SITTING IN AN EASY CHAIR BY THE FIRE, A STRANGE LOOK ON HER FACE.

Dorothy's Heartache

By FLORENCE HODGKINSON, Author of
"Ivy's Peril," &c., &c.
[A NOVELETTE.]
COMPLETED IN THIS NUMBER.

PROLOGUE.

LIT is a thousand pities so-called "good" people are generally intensely disagreeable, and that for pleasantness, amiability, genial manners, and those graces which do so much towards making home happy, we mostly have to go to the sinners, and not to the saints.

The Rev. William Ludlow, English chaplain of a remote French town, was reported to be very good indeed. His eldest daughter, Elizabeth, inherited all his virtues.

The congregation never tired of praising the pastor and his daughter, little guessing how very hard the two made life to the only creature entirely in their power—a slight, graceful girl of seventeen, who often fancied, in the desolation of her heart, she should have been happier had her father and sister boasted just a few less good works and a little more human kindness.

It was almost impossible to believe that Tina, as she was always called, could be own daughter to that stern, hard-featured man who delighted in thundering forth orations of gloomy threats to the small

handful of English who assembled weekly in the large whitewashed room, which, for want of a better substitute, did duty as a church. There was not one feature of Mr. Ludlow's face, or of Elizabeth's either, in Tina's.

The child was more than pretty, she was beautiful. Snubbed, neglected, and chidden at home, had she only been allowed to shine in society, golden-haired Tina would have been a general favourite.

Not that she pined after pleasure or amusement as many girls of seventeen would have done. She had one object in life—one desire was to escape from La Croix and return to England—the native land she could just remember—to be clever enough to keep a little home together for

Next Week: The Story of a Convict's Dash for Liberty.

herself and one other—to rescue one who might be soon a second victim of Elizabeth's austerities, and to be free for ever of those endless sermons in the blank, desolate room her father called his church. Such were the sole desires of the beautiful unvalued daughter.

But with the June flowers there came a new light into Tina's life. A young Englishman, wandering through France on a sketching tour, passed through La Croix, and being struck by the rare beauty of the pastor's younger child he lingered on, and tried to find an opportunity of getting an introduction to her.

He was young, impetuous, and desperately in love. He knew his uncle had far other views for his future. He knew that an obscure chaplain's daughter would not be approved of as his niece by the haughty nobleman; but where did love ever reason?

Captain Disney, despairing of finding anyone to present him to the object of his choice, introduced himself one day to Tina when he met her wandering by the sea-shore.

It was most unheard-of and unconventional, but then, Miss Ludlow was romantic and enthusiastic.

She met Gerald Disney at first because he was unlike anyone she had ever seen. She went on meeting him because she liked to listen to his long stories of her native land; and so she drifted on, until one day, when her lover took courage to tell her the "old, old story," she discovered that he was dearer to her than all the world.

"I am not rich, my darling!" said the young soldier, frankly; "besides my pay I have only three hundred a year; but you have simple tastes, Tina, and I think you would not mind."

"I should not mind anything with you," she whispered: "and to me it sounds riches, for I have been poor all my life."

"What will Mr. Ludlow say?" asked Captain Disney, a little anxiously. "Dear, do you think he will consent to let his treasure marry a man likely to be sent to India in a few months?"

Tina sighed.

"I am not his treasure," she said, sadly. "I don't think papa cares for anything in the world but money. Perhaps he can't help it," she added, naively; "but he has never been able to like me."

"He must be a strange man!" said Gerald, quickly; "but, Tina, we won't regret his want of taste, since it may make him more willing to give you to me. Dear, will you let me speak to him?"

There came to Tina a sudden recollection of the life she had planned for herself—of the work she had meant to do, and the great need there was of her earning money if she would save another from the life of neglect and unkindness she had suffered at La Croix.

Something of that she had said to Captain Disney, and he did not laugh at her scruples as some men might have. He only said, gravely,—

"Marry me, dear, and your friends shall be mine. I told you we shall not be rich, but I am quite sure we can manage what you have set your heart on. And now, tell me, may I come and speak to Mr. Ludlow to-night?"

If he had loved the child before, he loved her yet more dearly when he had seen her home. How such a barren, ugly, desolate place could have produced such a flower he could not imagine! He called about eight, and told the grim, gaunt woman who admitted him he wanted to see Mr. Ludlow on business.

"My father sees no strangers without an

introduction," she said, curtly. "In his position, he has to be careful against forming promiscuous acquaintances."

This, then, was his darling's sister, the "Elizabeth" whom she so dreaded! Gerald came to the conclusion he did not wonder at any one being afraid of such an austere, gloomy-looking woman.

He raised his hat and, stepping forward, put one foot inside the threshold, which was just in time to save the door being slammed in his face.

"I do not think my acquaintance would disgrace your father, madam? I am an officer in the English army, and my uncle, the Earl of Disney, would, I know, guarantee my respectability."

The satire was lost on Elizabeth; the sound of a title had charms for her. She decided the young man might be safely admitted, and ushered him into her father's study, where the pastor was preparing his sermon.

Gerald went straight to the point. Of the most unassuming nature, he had never in his life before begun an interview by stating his parentage, but then he had never had to do with such people as Elizabeth Ludlow and her father.

"I am grandson of the late and nephew of the present Earl of Disney," he said, quietly. "I hold the position of captain in one of Her Majesty's regiments, and I have about three hundred a year of my own besides my pay. I am an orphan, and entirely my own master. I do not owe a penny in the world, and I have come tonight to ask your consent to my marriage with your second daughter!"

Mr. Ludlow stared; Elizabeth stared. It half seemed to Gerald they could not help it. At first he fancied they did not believe him, and said, stiffly,—

"Sir Andrew Gordon, who is staying at the Hotel de l'Emperor, will endorse every word I have told you. He is an old friend of my uncle."

"My dear young friend," said Mr. Ludlow shook Gerald's hand warmly, "I am far from doubting your truth, but I am greatly surprised your choice should have fallen on a chit of a girl who has seen nothing of the world. Tina and her sister are both mere children, more fit for the nursery than a wedding ring."

Captain Disney thought Elizabeth was certainly not a "mere child," but he let it pass.

"I am thirty-two years old, sir," he said, gravely, "and I never cared for any woman before. I am not a boy to change my mind. If I do not marry Tina I shall never have a wife! I can prove every word I have said about my own position, and I am willing to settle the whole of my private income on my wife. That being so, I think I have a right to ask for your consent to my becoming your son-in-law."

"Softly, softly!" said the parson, blandly. "My dear young friend. I am most flattered and honoured by your proposal! But what will your own people say? Is it likely they will approve of your choosing a wife from an obscure French country town? My children may be poor, but they have never been a cause of contention in other families; and no daughter of mine shall marry a man whose relations would look down on her!"

"As it happens, sir, I have singularly few relations to like or dislike my plans. I am that unlucky creature—an only son. Both my sisters are dead, my parents also. Beyond a few distant cousins, I have none of my own flesh and blood left, except my uncle, Lord Disney."

The pastor's eyes sparkled.

"Lord Disney is unmarried. Do you mean me to infer that you are his heir?"

"Most certainly not!" replied Gerald, firmly. "The moment the breath is out of his body I must be Lord Disney, and inherit every penny of his property, unless he leaves a son; but he is barely sixty, hale and hearty, in full possession of all his faculties, so that there is nothing in the world to prevent his marrying any day."

"But he would not do so unless you offended him."

Gerald refused to give any pledge:

"He has held the chance of his marrying over me as a threat ever since I left school. He has tried to hamper me by so many conditions and restrictions that when I got my commission I took my own stand. I told Lord Disney I should always be glad of his affection, but that I meant to try and live within my own income, and so be prepared for any matrimonial surprise he had in store for me. He does not like it—he complains often that I do not live in a style befitting his heir, but we are very good friends, and I am far happier than if I counted on an inheritance that might never be mine."

"The young should humour the old," said Mr. Ludlow, sententiously. "I consider you have behaved very imprudently, sir! You may have damaged your prospects seriously."

"Well, it doesn't matter," said Gerald, with provoking nonchalance. "And, anyway, we need not discuss it now. I want you to give Tina to me, sir, in my character of an officer and a gentleman, not in my role of Lord Disney's possible heir."

Miss Ludlow struck in here.

"My father would not do the Earl such an injustice as to suffer such an event to happen without his knowledge. A clergyman could not connive at a clandestine marriage!"

She had given Mr. Ludlow his cue.

"Certainly not," said the old man, pompously. "Not to be thought of for a moment, sir! All must be fair and above-board if you marry a girl of mine!"

It was a good deal for the strength of the young man's love that it stood the test of this interview.

Gerald was a person of strong likes and dislikes, but he had never before taken such a desperate aversion to anyone as he conceived for Mr. Ludlow and Elizabeth.

The consultation was long and troubled. Gerald would far rather have persuaded Tina to put her hand in his, and be married at the nearest English church (that of St. Croix itself was, of course, forbidden ground), but he was scrupulously sensitive as regarded his darling's feelings, and he would not induce her to take a step which might alarm her; and he was, besides, profoundly ignorant of the marriage laws. Whether English people living in France were bound by the same regulations as French subjects, even, he did not know.

Then Tina was a minor; and, altogether, she was so uncertain of the forms and ceremonies required to make a stolen marriage binding in France that he simply dared not suggest an elopement.

Mr. Ludlow at last pronounced his ultimatum.

He would receive Captain Disney's proposals, and accept him as a son-in-law, on condition that the young man started that night for England, and broke the news to the Earl. Until a written permission came from that august nobleman, the engagement would not be regarded as a fact.

"He will yield," said this wily man, hopefully. "My child is fair and graceful. She has no needy relations in England to trouble him, so I doubt not, sir, your noble uncle will formally sanction your marrying Tina."

"Can I see her?" asked Gerald, eagerly. He was suffered to go alone into the stable manger, where Tina was sitting by herself,

very anxious as to the result of his interview.

"I think it will be all right," said the young man, cheerfully: "but your father insists on my going to England, and obtaining my uncle's consent to our engagement before he gives his own sanction. I start to-night, and as I don't know where my uncle chances to be just now, I may be detained longer than I like; but, Tina, I shall count the hours till I can come back to you, and, at the very longest, I shall not be away beyond a week."

She looked up at him with quivering lip.

"I feel as though I should never see you again. Your uncle will never let you come back!"

"Do you think he or anyone else could keep me away from you! Look up, my darling! A soldier's wife must be made of braver stuff than this. Tina, my dearest, can't you trust me?"

"Better than my own life!"

"Then why those tears?"

She shivered.

"I think they hate me—papa and Elizabeth, I mean. They will part us, Gerald, I am sure of it."

"You foolish child! Tina, shall I tell you my opinion of your father? Do not be hurt or wounded, dear, by my plain speaking. I believe Mr. Ludlow will not attempt to part us, unless a richer suitor appears. Now, think a bit, childie, and tell me if there is any dreaded rival to come forward directly I have gone? If there is, sweetheart, I will not leave you. I will haunt your father's house until he gives you to me!"

The girl looked up with a bright smile.

"There is not a single unmarried man in St. Croix," she said, brightly; "and, of course, I cost father a great deal of money. Elizabeth is always complaining of the difference I make in the housekeeping. I am quite happy now, Gerald; it will be so much more economical to get rid of me that I am quite sure that they will let us be happy together."

Gerald sighed.

"I hate leaving you in such hands, dear; but your father's condition sounds fair enough, and I can't tell him I won't go to England, because I am afraid of his being unkind to you."

"No. You must go, Gerald!"

"My darling!"

"You are sure you will come back! Promise me just this, that even if you change your mind you will come to St. Croix and tell me so with your own lips. I can bear anything better than suspense."

"You shall have no suspense, my dearest! I will be back again in a week at longest, and I shall write to you every day, even though you cannot answer my letters, as I shall be moving about continually. And now, sweetheart, we must say good-bye!"

The dearest, saddest word in the English language—the sweetest of all farewell greetings. Of how many aching hearts—of how many loving memories—has it been cherished; but never, since "good-bye" was first spoken, had it been uttered by a truer, more trusting heart than the old pastor's daughter!

CHAPTER I.

If anyone had asked Priscilla Cameron what was the greatest mistake ever made in her family she would have shrugged her shoulders, and answered, "John's marriage!" and this from no particular prejudice against her sister-in-law since when she wrote long epistles to all her dear friends about "poor John's mistake," she had never set eyes on the beautiful girl who was Lady Cameron.

Now, without pausing to deliberate whether the said marriage was or was not an error, we may state frankly that it could not have been the mistake that led to Dorothy's heartache, since that particular blunder happened some months after Sir John had entered the bonds of holy matrimony.

Miss Priscilla stoutly affirmed he had no right to enter those bonds at all, shaking her head gloomily over her eternal knitting as she discussed her brother's folly. She went on to remark that she had kept house for him over a dozen years—ever since, in fact, he came to London a poor medical student, who needed a home while he walked the hospitals, and who had not any, but the most distant, chance of inheriting the family estates and the baronetcy.

The former were well worth having, while the latter was two centuries old, and the poor medical student did actually inherit both—his sister said, "through the mercy of Providence;" but other people thought that rather a strange way of putting it, since her brother's prosperity was owing to quite half-a-dozen unexpected deaths.

It was an enormous change in any young man's prospects, and might well have turned John's head.

He was only twenty-nine, and he passed at one bound from a needy suburban doctor—who had but few patients of any sort, and fewer still who could afford to pay—to a powerful baronet, the master of Cameron Hall, and five thousand a-year.

He had no probationary period, no waiting for dead men's shoes, no years of dependence on the will of some crotchety relation.

He went out one morning to his rounds just as usual, and in his own opinion the least likely man in Clapham to come into a fortune. He returned at two to find a letter from his uncle's lawyer, informing him of the death of that gentleman and his son from a malignant fever raging at the Italian town where they were staying, and begging him to act as guardian to his cousin's orphan children.

The young doctor never even saw his wards; before he could start for Italy, their father's valet wrote the sad news that they had succumbed to the same fever as his master.

Six Camerons, of three different generations, had been carried off in one week, and John was the head of his family.

It was a very pleasant change for him, and his sister rejoiced in his good fortune, though it certainly increased her own toils.

Ever since her brother went into tail-coats her one object in life had been to guard him from "man-traps," as she called all marriageable young ladies.

When he became Sir John Cameron, of the Hall, the "man-traps" gave Priscilla far more trouble; but the shrewd spinster never shirked her duty, and piloted her brother safely through three years of prosperity. Then he went yachting, which she deemed a perfectly safe amusement, since she ascertained no ladies were to be invited.

Lo and behold the yacht met with an accident, and they had to run into the harbour of a small French town, which boasted an English clergyman. In a month's time all Priscilla's patient efforts were destroyed.

Sir John proposed to Miss Ludlow when he had known her a week, and at the end of four he wrote to his sister and announced his marriage.

It was very sudden. Other people besides Miss Cameron thought him terribly rash. But the fact was, Sir John detested France.

The Ludlows had apparently no English relations who could invite Dorothy on a visit. He hardly cared to confide in any of

his own friends, and consequently the difficulties in the way of a protracted courtship were so great that Sir John really thought the simplest thing was to marry his darling at once, and take her home and make sunshine at Cameron Hall.

As to Dorothy, she was just twenty. The sweetest, most bewitching girl you can imagine, with just a touch—a very slight touch—of French coquetry, and the truest, tenderest heart in the world.

Sir John, who had never even fancied himself in love before, poured out a wealth of devotion on his Dorothy.

The poverty-stricken father, and the care-worn elder sister alike, thought their charge fortunate, and Dorothy became lady Cameron without one single apparent regret or foreboding.

Sir John did not press his new relations to visit him and his bride speedily. Thoroughly in love, though he was, he had not taken a great fancy to either Elizabeth Ludlow or her father.

They always spoke to him of Dorothy as their "dear little girl." They often addressed her in his presence as "darling," "Mignon," or "love," but John never heard his fiancée speak one word of endearment to either the pastor or his sister.

With them she seemed almost a different creature. Obedient in all things to her father, helpful and really useful to Elizabeth, John yet felt certain that she had no real affection for either of them.

She never seemed quite at ease when they were by. He fancied once he had seen her shudder when the old pastor offered her a caress.

She was a loving, tender disposition. Surely if she did not care for her father and sister, it must be because at some time or other they had been unkind to her!

He asked her the question once—was there any cause of quarrel between her and Elizabeth, and she answered him with something very like a sob.

"John, dear, don't ask me. There is nothing in the whole world Elizabeth could do for me now. She once refused a request of mine. It was something I had very much at heart, and I have never been able to forget it!"

"You must tell your wishes to me now, dear," he answered, fondly, "and I will do my best to gratify them. You are such a fairy you ought not to have one fancy ungratified. I think I shall call you Tina! I am sure you are just like Queen Titania, the queen of the fairies!"

To his amazement, she burst into a fit of crying. He tried in vain to soothe her, but, for a time, it really seemed as though she could not recover her self-command.

"It was very foolish of me," she said, wistfully, when she grew calmer. "You must not be angry, John, only please never call me Tina. I—I cannot bear the sound of the name. We knew a girl once called Tina, and she was—not happy!"

She finished with another sob, and John Cameron, who could see no fault in his darling, only reproached himself for agitating her.

"You know I like your own name, sweetheart!" he said, gently. "Nothing could be more beautiful than its meaning, gift of God!" but it is a wee bit dignified for a little girl like you!"

"Call me Dolly!" she answered, with a smile. "When I was a child everyone used to call me Dolly, and I like it ever so much better than Dorothy!"

"I don't think you are much more than a child still!" returned Sir John, much relieved to see her smile again. "Aren't you afraid of a staid, old husband, more than a dozen years older than yourself?"

"I am not in the least terrified of you!"

said Dolly, cheerfully; "but I do confess I am just a wee bit frightened of your sister!"

So was John.

Perhaps that was why they did not go to the Hall as soon as they returned to England after their month's tour in Italy. Sir John had a very pretty little place in Devonshire, and he stayed there with his bride for several weeks.

But, after all, the critical moment of the sisters-in-law meeting must be faced some day; and so, about three months after the wedding, when they were what Dorothy called quite "old married people," her husband mooted the question to her they really ought to go to Cameron, but—what was to become of Priscilla?

"Let her stay!" said the young wife, kindly. "I am quite sure I could never manage a dozen servants, let alone order grand dinners."

John hesitated.

"I don't think my sister is a very cheerful person, dear; and I should be vexed if you were depressed by her."

Dolly shook her head.

"There's no fear of that! but perhaps she won't like me. John, suppose you ask her to stay with us three months; then, if she doesn't seem happy, you can find her a dear little house of her own close to the Hall."

Miss Priscilla replied to this offer (which John wrote to her). "She wouldn't trouble him to find a house for her. If he turned her out of the Hall, no doubt the Union would take her in, as, thanks to her devotion to her brother, she was a pauper!"

John Cameron did not show this letter to his wife. He saw his solicitor as they passed through London, and instructed him to draw up a deed settling three hundred a year on Priscilla; then he took Dorothy down to the Hall, quite resolved that, if things did not go smoothly, he and his wife would travel about, and leave Priscilla in possession of Cameron.

Dolly quaked a little when she was introduced to Miss Priscilla. She had never been looked at quite so strangely before. Her sister-in-law reminded her of the hideous Dutch dolls which used to be sold in little toy-shops, wonderful productions for a penny, but whose limbs declined to move under any circumstances.

Miss Cameron looked quite as wooden as those wonderful dolls.

"And is this your wife, John?" demanded his sister, with an awful sniff. "I am surprised at you!"

John did not seem in the least ashamed of himself, but looked, instead, ridiculously happy.

"You can't be more surprised than I am, Priscilla, that Dolly should accept such a sober, middle aged husband!"

"You are only thirty-two!" returned his sister. "She looks just fit to be shut up in a nursery with a doll. I wonder you could get a clergyman to marry you!"

"I shall get older every day!" said Dolly, cheerfully. "Now, Jack, show me my room, or I shall be late for dinner."

She came downstairs presently in white silk and lace—the dress chosen by her maid as appropriate to the bride's home coming.

Miss Priscilla, who retained her snuff-coloured linsey, looked horrified at the young wife's extravagance.

CHAPTER II.

THE days passed on. All the people in the neighbourhood who were somebodies called, and so did a great many who were not. Everyone was delighted with John Cameron's choice, and Miss Priscilla, having the sense perhaps to see no bitter

speeches of her's could undo her brother's marriage, waxed very nearly amiable.

And so December came round. There were to be grand doings at Christmas at the Hall. Sir John meant to fill his beautiful old house with guests. On Christmas Eve there was to be a grand ball, to which all the neighbourhood was bidden. Dorothy would make her first appearance then in the role of hostess, and Sir John, who was intensely proud of his wife's beauty, sent the family jewels to be reset, with strict orders they were to be back in time for the ball.

And when all was going so blithely, when the county had welcomed Lady Cameron so warmly, and even Priscilla seemed won by her pretty sister-in-law, lo! there rose a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand between the husband and wife.

No one saw it but themselves. Neither of them could quite explain how it arose, only John fancied his wife was keeping something from him, and that her blue eyes did not meet his quite so frankly as they used; and Dorothy was filled with a bitter regret for a promise given long ago, and after any tête-à-tête with her husband, often murmured to herself,—

"If only they had let me tell him! He is so good, Jack! He would not have been hard on us!"

He found her in tears once—tears that she could not explain; and once in mistake—he was too honourable to have done it willingly—he took up one of her sister's letters, and read this line, "You are very foolish to think about that matter, and I will not hear of your telling Sir John. Men do not understand these things! You were only a child, and no one could blame you!"

Poor John Cameron! Simple, honest-hearted fellow that he was, for him the words could bear but one explanation. His wife had had another lover! His little Dorothy, whose heart he fancied he had won, had cared for someone else, and been persuaded into marrying him for the sake of his position.

The doubt crept into his soul and tortured him. He began to avoid being alone with his wife, and concocted business on the estate that would take him away from her. Of course that was why she was sad. She had cared for someone else, and they had given her to a grave, sober old fogey like himself instead. Well, she should have all she had married for—home, rank, fortune—and he would do his best that her chains should press on her as lightly as possible.

The shadow was between them. It grew apace, until, when John gave his wife the list of visitors she was to invite to stay in the house for Christmas, it came on Dorothy with a start of pain that it was days since they two had had a talk together.

She took the list mechanically, and glanced down it.

"I do not like Lord Disney!" she said, simply.

"Do you know him?"

"I have heard of him!"

"We are great friends," said John, stiffly, "and it was an old promise that he should spend Christmas here; so, unless you can give me any good reason for your dislike, I would rather the invitation went!"

"Very well!"

"I shall be going up to London tomorrow, Dorothy. Is there anything I can bring you?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"I suppose you would not care to run up yourself for a few hours? It is quite an easy journey, you know—only an hour in the train!"

"No, thank you, John. I would rather stay here!"

"You and Priscilla get on pretty well, don't you?"

"Very well indeed! She told me yesterday I looked much older. She meant it as a great compliment!"

Sir John looked at her gravely.

"Yes! You are not the child I brought here last September."

The words smote her to the heart. Was she losing her good looks, and had he tired of her? His very voice in speaking to her had changed. Dorothy got up with a weary sigh.

"It is getting late, and I am tired. What train shall you come home by to-morrow, John?"

"Not before seven. Just in time for dinner."

Lady Cameron was still in bed when her husband partook of a hurried early breakfast, and started for the station.

Priscilla wished him good-bye, and opined he would miss his train.

He had a good deal to do in London, but he got through it in surprisingly quick time, and could have caught the three o'clock train home; but, having told Dorothy he should be away till seven, he would not return earlier, and seem to be a spy upon her movements, he turned into a restaurant, and ordered lunch, thinking it would pass some of the time on his hands.

It was a very superior establishment. Many ladies who had been shopping were refreshing themselves, some alone, others with husband or father. The whole place seemed full of cheerful, happy faces.

Sir John buried himself in his newspaper, and wished he had persuaded Dorothy to accompany him.

He looked up suddenly, and saw at the small table opposite to him—his wife!

She had not recognised him. Quick as thought, he shaded his face again behind the newspaper, while he covertly watched her.

Yes, it was Dorothy, not a doubt of it! Those blue eyes and golden brown hair could belong to no one else. A little pale, a little troubled, but with a light in her eyes he had not seen there lately, and a strange, bright smile upon her lips.

Her companion, Sir John, did not see—would not, perhaps, be the better term. He seemed if to feel he once saw the man's face he must make a scene, and assault him savagely. For his wife's sake he must keep calm. His wife, his Dorothy, the girl who had vowed to love and honour him for all time. If she only knew how his heart ached!

He could not hear what her companion said to her, but he caught every word of her reply. The low, sweet voice, which had once been music to his ears was wonderfully clear and distinct.

"I could not help it," she said, simply. "You had gone away. He told me it would ruin you, and I must forget."

Again a speech which Sir John could not catch.

"Oh, no. I went away from St. Croix as soon as I could. It was torture for me to be there, where everything spoke of you. My father and sister were angry with me. They did not understand."

Sir John could bear it no longer. He understood. This was the story Dorothy had not been allowed to tell him. This was the thing for which "no one could blame her." She had loved unhappily, and been parted from her lover. She had believed all was over, and had married Sir John.

He went out quickly. Not for worlds would he have stayed longer. His faith in his wife was perfect. He felt certain this meeting with her lost love was the last.

Perhaps she had sought it to explain, and break to him her marriage.

She would go home to her husband's house and loyally try to be true to the letter of her marriage vows, if it was beyond her strength to keep the spirit of them.

It came on Sir John slowly that life could never be worth much to either of them now. He was a young man still, only thirty-two. Dorothy might be old and haggard before he could set her free. Oh, the pity of it! oh, the pity of it!

His heart hardened as he thought of the father and elder sister who had pressed on the sacrifice and deceived him. He blamed them bitterly. He did not blame Dorothy. He only felt he could not bear his life much longer as it was. He must make a change. But how? She was so young and innocent. She could never be left to bear the burden of life alone. Not for worlds would he have sent her back to the father who had wronged her. But then there was Priscilla, a shrewd, sensible woman, who would keep down gossip; and a chaperon could easily be found for her duties.

Yes, that must be it—he would go away. He telegraphed to his wife—he wondered how soon she would part from her lover and go home—that he would not reach the Hall until the following afternoon. Then he went off to his lawyer's, the very man who had drawn up the deed of settlement on Priscilla, and made a fresh will, greatly surprising Mr. Carlyle, who had strongly advised the step on Sir John's marriage, only he refused.

The Baronet had declared then that it was far better—since the estate was charged with an allowance for his wife—to wait a year or two before making his last testament.

Perhaps there had been visions flitting through Cameron's brain then of little children who might need to be provided for—children with Dorothy's golden hair. Well, even if so, the visions had faded now.

Sir John made his will practically and prosaically on a sheet of letter-paper. He insisted on its being drawn up, signed and sealed that very afternoon. Its contents were of the shortest, and no one who had read the loving mention of his wife could possibly have guessed how much his great true heart had been wounded by her lack of confidence.

"And to my dear wife, Dorothy, I bequeath all of which I may die possessed, except the amount required for the before-mentioned legacies. And I hereby assure her of my unwavering love and trust, and my perfect faith in the way she may dispose of her future life."

"I am going to America!" said Sir John, shortly, when the will was sealed up and locked in one of Mr. Carlyle's patent safes. "Of course, I know there is very seldom an accident on board one of the ocean steamers, but it's better to have things in order."

"To America!" and Mr. Carlyle suffered just a little of the surprise and astonishment he had felt throughout the interview to escape him. "That is news, Sir John. How will Lady Cameron like to cross the Atlantic in winter?"

"Oh! my wife will remain at home," replied Sir John, civilly. "I am only going on business."

Mr. Carlyle said nothing, though like that oft-quoted learned parrot, he certainly "thought more." The two men shook hands and parted.

Sir John decided he had got his plans in train very well. A voyage to America on business was a good excuse for leaving England (he would have been taken considerably aback had anyone inquired the

nature of the business). His young wife would not be expected to take such a journey in the depths of winter. "Business" might detain him six months, a year, or even two. By that time people would have left off wondering at the peculiarity of his domestic arrangements.

And so, perfectly infatuated by his strange mistake, Sir John went home to Cameron Hall, where he was to bring on Dorothy a cruel heartache.

CHAPTER III.

It wanted two days to Christmas Eve! Most of the guests invited to stay at the Hall had arrived—a brilliant party who made so many demands on the attention of their host and hostess that really it was not wonderful Dorothy and her husband had no time for each other.

The young wife bore herself bravely, and held her pretty little head erect. No one could guess from Lady Cameron's face that she was suffering from a bitter heartache. No one could divine that Sir John had hardly touched her hand or called her by her name since his return from London.

Dolly thought he had grown quite tired of her. Pride kept her up and helped her to move among her guests a bright and gracious hostess; but the girl's heart ached terribly, and her beautiful eyes were too bright for health.

"You look as if you had a fever, child!" said Miss Priscilla, not unkindly, as she caught sight of Dorothy's flushed cheeks. "You do too much."

"Oh, I am quite strong!" and she passed on with her partner, Captain Travers, a near neighbour of the Camerons.

"Delightful place the Hall!" he said, pleasantly, when they paused for a moment. "I always told Cameron it only wanted a mistress to make it perfect."

"John is very fond of the Hall."

"Yes. I wonder he can make up his mind to leave it, but I suppose he will only be away a few months?"

Dorothy's heart beat quickly, but she never betrayed this was news to her. John going away for weeks, perhaps months, and to let her hear it from a stranger! He must, indeed, have wearied of her!

Poor little Dorothy! It cost her an effort, but she pressed back the rising tears, and answered, bravely,—

"Some journeys are necessary, you know."

"Of course. Do you know, Lady Cameron, I never quite believed it till I spoke to you. When Carlyle told me I felt inclined to laugh. The idea of John going to America on business seemed absurd!"

America! And Mr. Carlyle was her husband's lawyer. Then it must be true!

"America is not so very far."

"Well, I am thankful you are not going to desert us, too! It would be too bad to lose you both, and have the Hall left to Miss Priscilla!"

Dorothy danced with many other partners but she hardly heard what they said. That Christmas Eve seemed to her one long pain. She had only room in her heart for one thought. John was going away, and he had not even thought it necessary to tell her of his plans herself!

The child—she was little more—felt a mist rise before her eyes as she tried to picture her life without him. He was so good and true, and yet he had tired of her! The love that had seemed so warm and passionate had lasted but a few brief months.

It was a brilliant ball. People declared there had been nothing like it that winter in the county. Beautiful, fair-haired Lady Cameron was the admired of all her guests, and all the time the poor girl was longing wearily for the moment when it would be over, when the neighbours would have gone

to their own homes, the guests staying at the house have retired, and she could speak to her husband.

It came at last. It was the small hours of the morning when Sir John entered his dressing-room, and in an easy chair by the fire saw his wife sitting with a strange look on her fair face, as her eyes searched the glowing coals, as though for some story written there.

She had taken off her splendours; silks, lace, and jewels were gone. She wore a soft wrapper of pale blue cashmere, and her fair hair flowed over her shoulders. She looked almost like a child, and Sir John's heart filled with pity for her and himself.

"You here, Dorothy!" he said, cheerfully. "I hoped you were in bed long ago!"

"I wanted to speak to you, John."

"Won't to-morrow be long enough for talking, Dorothy? It is past three o'clock!"

"I will not keep you long," she said, rising, and looking into his face with a strange intensity. "I want to ask you if it is true that you are going to America?"

"Yes."

"You might have told me."

"I intended to do so after Christmas! I did not want the matter talked of while the house was full of people. I can't imagine who told you."

"Captain Travers. He had it from Mr. Carlyle."

"Ah! Well, Dolly, it is getting late, and—"

The blue eyes flashed with indignation, and she interrupted him.

"I am not a child," she said, sadly, "and I ought not to be treated as one. You should not have left me to hear this from a stranger. If you had made up your mind to leave home without consulting me, you might, at least, have told me!"

"I intended to. Indeed, I must have told you, for I want to know your wishes about yourself. My plan was that you should stay here with Priscilla. She is not a very attractive companion, perhaps, but you seem to get on with her, and you are too young to live alone!"

"I like Priscilla," said Dorothy, slowly. "She may not make any protestations, but she is sincere. Shall you be away long, Sir John?"

The sound of his title from his wife's lips hurt him strangely, but he had hardened himself, and gave no sign of feeling it.

"Perhaps a year! Perhaps longer!"

"It is very sudden."

"Can you wonder at it, Dorothy?" he said, sternly, put out at her seeming indifference, and resolved not to spare her.

"Can you wonder that home is distasteful to me when my wife is deceiving me?"

It came on her with a rush that he knew her secret. She never asked how he had discovered it; never attempted to defend herself. It was enough for her that he knew it.

"You cannot deny it, Dorothy," he said in a different tone. "You know that when you promised to be my wife, when you stood beside me at the altar, and all through our life together since, you have kept a secret from me!"

"I wanted to tell you," answered Dorothy, "but they would not let me—papa and Elizabeth. They said you were a proud man, and that it would send you away!"

"That was it," he echoed, bitterly. "It was a splendid position—Lady Cameron, of Cameron Hall, with money, title, and jewels. It was worth saving for! And so you proved an apt pupil, and helped them to deceive me!"

"And you think I married you for that?" said Dorothy, quietly. "You think your wealth and title bought me, Sir John?"

"Knowing the secret you have kept from me, I do! Oh, Dorothy! why did you not trust me? I loved you so, I would have pardoned anything but deceit!"

It seemed to the girl-wife a harsh name to give her conduct, but she made no complaint.

"I think I understand," she said, slowly. "Your business in America is a myth. You are going away just to escape from me!"

"Say, rather, to end the mockery our life together has become. Child, don't you see we are living one long lie? All I can do for you is to leave you in full possession of the things for which you sold yourself, and to free you from the presence of the husband you have deceived!"

"It seems a pity you should leave your home," said Dorothy, thoughtfully. "It would be far easier for me to go!"

"That I would never consent to! You are my wife, and bear my name. Though all else is over between us, I cannot forget that!"

She left him calm and dry-eyed, but when she reached her own room her composure gave way.

Throwing herself on her knees, she wept as though her very heart would break, for those cruel words still rang in her ears—"all else is over!"

By degrees she grew calmer, but she made no attempt to go to bed.

She sat quite still on the sofa, trying, poor child, to realise what had happened. She put one hand to her head, and tried to think. She went over slowly every detail of her married life, and a deep indignation filled her.

If her husband had loved her as he protested, he must have forgiven the secret she had kept from him, since it concerned only the dead, and through it no shadow, even of scandal, could fall upon his name. And because of this secret of the past, which, after all, was no deed of hers, he was going to America! He never cared to see her again. He even thought she had married him for his money.

Unhappily, Dorothy Cameron was quite as proud as her husband. Not to save her life would she have told him she loved him so well that all the wealth in the world would have been worthless to her without him!

He had judged her harshly; he was going to leave her. Well, he might take his own way; but, at least, he should find he was mistaken. She would work her fingers to the bone. She would starve, even, rather than touch the money he said had bought her!

Poor Dorothy! She would never stay in her husband's home after he had left it; but never was creature more unfitted to struggle with the world.

Go back to St. Croix she dared not. She could not trust her father and sister. They might afford her a grudging shelter, and yet, all the while he was accepting a handsome allowance from Sir John for her support.

She had absolutely no friends of long standing; and those she had made since her marriage she could not have confided in, since one and all were intimate with her husband.

Suddenly her eyes fell upon a letter lying on her dressing-table.

The second post at Cameron came in a little before dinner, while the ladies were busy with their toilets.

Dorothy, whose correspondence was of a most uninteresting nature, never felt eager to read her letters. She had not even glanced at the outside of this one, but had bade the maid put it on one side till she was dressed,

She had forgotten all about it till this moment. Now, as she caught sight of the plain white envelope, it seemed to the heart-broken wife almost an answer from Heaven to her despairing tears.

She had felt so friendless, so utterly forsaken, and lo! here was the writing she had once loved best in all the world, and which she had never thought to see again.

The hot tears welled up into her eyes. All the sorrow of her young life—except the bitter grief of John's unkindness—was connected with the writer of this letter; and yet the very sight of the dear familiar characters roused her as nothing else could have done.

She seized the envelope with an eager cry, and tore it open impatiently, so great was her anxiety as to its contents.

For two long years she had not seen that writing; nay, more, she had been assured the hand that penned it was cold and still, and had been forbidden to speak of the writer, and assured that disgrace and trouble must be always associated with her memory.

Poor little Dorothy! The home from which Sir John had rescued her had not been merely commonplace and poverty-stricken. Two other fiends lurked there—avarice and treachery.

Mr. Ludlow passed outwardly for a good man. He laboured hard for a meagre pay. He spared himself no exertion, but his character was spoilt by one terrible blot, an over-craving love of money.

He had so very little to do with wealth it was strange he should so worship it; but avarice is not a sin confined to the rich, or it never could have eaten into the souls of John Ludlow and his eldest daughter.

How these two pinched and screwed to save a few golden coins! How hard and sordid they made the lives of Dorothy and her twin-sister—the children of Elizabeth's stepmother, and who surely had taken their dispositions as well as their beauty solely from her, since there was not one shred of resemblance between them and their half-sister!

The secret Dorothy had kept from her husband was a very simple one after all. The story of her sister Violet. It was very short and very sad.

Miss Elizabeth and her father declared it was disgraceful, but to Dorothy there always seemed more of sorrow than of shame about it.

She herself had been away at school, where she filled the post of pupil-teacher; and Violet, for the first time in their lives, was parted from her.

A gentleman happened to pass through La Croix on a sketching tour, and fell in love with Violet. He was a captain in the English army, and explained his position honourably to Mr. Ludlow, at whose suggestion he went to England to obtain his uncle's sanction to the match. So far all accounts agreed, after that they differed.

The young artist never returned to La Croix, but his uncle came, a pompous nobleman, Lord Disney, who declared the match must be broken off—that his nephew was a mere boy, and did not know his own mind.

Violet Ludlow refused to give up her lover except at his own bidding. Then the news came that the young captain had gone to India without a word of farewell.

Mr. Ludlow and Elizabeth shook their heads, and "hoped she was convinced now."

The weeks and months passed on. A strange air of prosperity seemed to come

to the Ludlow *ménage*. Money certainly flowed in from some fresh source.

Violet declared one morning that her father had sold her happiness—that he and Elizabeth had taken a bribe to suppress her lover's farewell letter, and suffered him to go to India doubting him.

There was a stormy, passionate scene one night. The next morning at daybreak Dorothy's twin sister was missing. Tina, to call her by the dear old pet name of her childhood, had run away.

No one knew where she had gone. Dorothy had been trusted with the intention of her flight, but nothing more. The twins in their farewell had promised solemnly never to believe evil of each other.

Violet would not urge Dorothy to go with her, because she felt the struggle before her was a hard one. She promised her sister if ever prosperity came to her to send for her; and Dorothy, on her side, promised never, never to forget her twin-sister.

That was all!

The storm of reproaches, of angry taunts, and bitter words that broke on Dorothy's head well-nigh stunned her. She felt then that Violet had been wise to go.

If she really thought Elizabeth and her father had betrayed her it was better for her to suffer any hardship than live with them.

Mr. Ludlow was furious. He affected to believe Violet had gone to India to seek out her lover. He solemnly forbade her name to be mentioned in his presence, and declared henceforth he had but two daughters.

And when a year had dragged its weary course, and Dorothy, hoping time had softened him, ventured to plead for Violet, he assured her she must never hope to see her sister again. The fugitive was dead.

Had she had the faintest hope that her twin-sister lived Dorothy would never have given the promise to keep Violet's story a secret from Sir John.

Had there been the smallest chance of finding her she would have made the search for her sister her first request to her husband; but, as it was, believing that Violet slept in a nameless grave, assured by Elizabeth that the disgrace of her fate would be considered a heavy blot on the family honour, Dorothy did as she was bid, and kept the secret.

It was only when they were home at the Hall that she discovered the awkwardness of her promise.

She could never talk freely of the past, because that past was interlinked with Violet's. She could never speak of her childhood's days, because she must not name the sweet twin-sister she had lost.

It seemed to Dorothy treachery to her husband to keep such a secret from him; and so she wrote and urged Elizabeth to release her from her promise. It was Miss Ludlow's reply Sir John read.

Dorothy Cameron knew nothing of the world. She had been taught to believe people would think Violet's flight a disgrace to her family; and when Sir John so bitterly resented the secret he had discovered, it seemed to the poor child that he would not have married her had he known the turned-down page of her history. He fancied she had plotted to keep back the story lest it should lose her a rich husband, and could not pardon the deception.

To Dorothy, who loved Sir John intensely, it never even occurred he could suspect her of caring for someone else.

Sir John would not speak plainly, and tell his wife he had seen her with a stranger in London, and heard her own voice proclaim she had loved him.

He only spoke vaguely, and to Dorothy all his words applied to the secret she had kept

from him; and so, too proud to defend herself, the breach widened, and the wedded pair, who loved each other so truly, drifted apart.

And now, in her despair, when all the world seemed blank to her, and she would have said nothing mattered any more, there came this letter in the writing of the twin-sister, who had once been part of herself, whom she had loved more dearly than any other living creature—except her husband.

A swift certainty came to Dorothy that her father had never had the news of Violet's death at all.

He had invented the story just to silence her. Then her very heart ached as she thought of all that her darling might have suffered in those two years; and with trembling fingers she unfolded the letter which had seemed at first almost a message from the grave.

"MY DEAREST DOLLY,—

"I know that you have been told to think me dead, and yet no one in all the world rejoiced more than I when I heard of your marriage.

"I was so thankful you were safe in a good man's love. I have seen you more than once, Dorothy, and I was proud to see my little sister a great lady; but I would not let you know I lived lest Sir John, being a proud man, should resent your having a sister so humbly off.

"But Dolly, the strangest joy has come to me. I have met Gerald once again, and he loves me still. He had been told that I was dead. After leaving St. Croix he was injured in a railway accident, and for three weeks he was quite unconscious. As soon as he recovered enough to speak and ask for me his uncle told him I was dead. He went to India believing it, and Lord Disney died so suddenly he had no time to undecieve Gerald even if he repented the cruel fraud that parted us.

"My darling came home for good last spring, for he is Lord Disney now; and oh! Dorothy, darling, I am his wife! We were married only a few days after our reunion; but Gerald said, in his ideas, we had been engaged three years, and he went and spoke to Mrs. Nicholls, whose little children I was teaching, and asked her to persuade me.

"I don't think, Dolly, I needed much convincing, for I loved him so it made me happy only to have found him again. So we were married by special license, and now my greatest wish is to see you.

"Gerald says he and Sir John are old friends, and that but for our strange meeting he should now be spending Christmas at Cameron Hall.

"Dolly, will you tell Sir John about me? He can't be angry now; and ask him to bring you very soon to

"Your loving sister,
"VIOLET."

"P.S.—Gerald says I am not altered, but I think I look much older than in those happy days when he knew me at St. Croix."

The long hours of the winter night wore away. They were not so many after all, for it was past three before Dorothy left her husband.

Miss Priscilla, who prided herself on getting up at seven, summer and winter—a custom which generally gave her two wasted hours before breakfast—had hardly finished putting on her cap when there came a tap at the door, and Dorothy presented herself.

It was strange how Dolly's gentleness had dismoured the one person who had meant to be her foe. Miss Cameron still called her brother's marriage a "mistake."

She thought all weddings in the abstract a mistake; but she never spoke a harsh

word to Dorothy, and in her own peculiar fashion was very much attached to her.

"You look just like a mealy potato!" was her flattering greeting. "If you must dance all night you should make up for it by staying in bed in the morning. You are just tired out!"

"I am troubled, not tired," corrected Lady Cameron, gently. "Priscilla, I want you to do me a favour!"

Priscilla shook her head.

"Not if it's to dance to-night and spare you," she replied. "I'm quite willing to try and help you; but I never liked dancing, and I'm too rheumatic for it now."

"It is not that at all. I have a letter from my sister, and I must go to her. You understand, Priscilla, I must go!"

"Well, you've told me that twice," said Priscilla. "Go on!"

"I want you to conceal my absence from John until he comes home from church. You see he might insist on coming as far as London with me, and it would be very awkward for you, with the guests in the house."

"It would be very rude to your guests. I'll do my best, Dorothy; and as you're a French maid, she ought to be able to take you over to France all right!"

Lady Cameron let the allusion pass. She had spoken the truth. She was going to her sister, she would write and tell John which sister. No need to enter into the painful subject with Priscilla.

"Go and lie down now," commanded the old maid, "and I shall tell John you look much too tired to go to church; then when he comes back I'll explain. It's a mercy for him I haven't relations who send for me at a moment's notice, or he'd be left without a hostess at all."

"And you will do your best?"

Priscilla bridled a little.

"I've kept house for John a good many years without your help, child!" she said, complacently, "and it'll be hard if I can't go doing it again. What's the matter with your sister?"

"She did not say."

"Well, you look more fit to be on a sick-bed yourself than to go trapping off to nurse other people. If you like to bring your sister here, I'll not mind looking after her for you."

"Thank you very much!" said Dorothy, gently. "Priscilla, please take care of John, and don't think anything wicked of me for going so suddenly! I think to stay here now would be agony to me!"

And Miss Cameron decided that Dorothy was much fonder of Miss Ludlow than she had suspected.

CHAPTER IV.

SIR JOHN CAMERON missed his wife at breakfast, and Priscilla's report that she was lying down with a bad headache did not satisfy him. He went to her dressing-room before he started for church to inquire into her health, but Dorothy had nerves herself than for the desperate step she was about to take.

She would not show her husband one trace of what she was suffering. He had misjudged her, and she was too proud to defend herself.

He had taunted her with marrying him for his money. He had hinted had he known of her twin-sister's history he would never have asked her to be his wife.

Well, soon he should know that that sister was married to a man of far higher rank than himself, and that the wife he had called mercenary was working for her bread rather than owe aught to him.

So these two who loved each other so dearly went on in their strange misunderstanding. One word of plain speaking and

everything must have been made clear, but each was too proud to speak it, and so the miserable mistake went on.

"She is nothing but a butterfly," thought Sir John, as he saw her on the sofa reading a French novel. How was he to tell the book had been caught up hastily at the sound of his footstep?

"Why did not Lord Disney come last night?" demanded Dorothy, much to her husband's amazement. "I understood you would be here without fail?"

"He telegraphed he was unavoidably detained, and would write to explain in a day or two."

"When do you go to America, John?" asked his wife, quietly. "I suppose you have decided?"

Her calmness irritated him.

"I have taken my passage in the Amazon. She sails on the fourth of January."

"Ten days hence!" The blue eyes were raised to meet his fearlessly now. "As it is so near, don't you think we might try to be friends? The past is past, you know. It would make things easier for me, and, I should think, happier for you, if you forgave me for keeping that one secret from you?"

Sir John shook his head.

"I hate shams! Friendship between us is impossible! We'll just keep up appearances, and in little more than a week you will be relieved of me, you know!"

But the relief came sooner than he thought. On his return from church the news met him. Lady Cameron's sister had sent for her, and she had started by the mid-day train.

Miss Priscilla told her brother the facts as she had heard them from Dorothy. The French maid had accompanied her mistress. They drove to the station in the brougham.

There was nothing to arouse scandal. The most punctilious of men could not have seen room for fault in his wife's rushing off to her sister's deathbed; but Sir John did not like it.

"I saw Dorothy before I went to church, and she never mentioned Elizabeth's illness."

"She thought you might wish to accompany her as far as London, and knew what a slight it would be to your guests," said the old maid, approvingly. "It's no use fuming, John; there's no train out of Cameron station for five hours, and long before that Dorothy will be at Dover. She meant to cross from there to Calais."

So the festivities had to go on without the fair young châtelaine, and many and loud were the regrets for her absence.

The house party were only remaining two days longer, and most of them considerably proposed to leave the Hall the following morning, so that Sir John might be free to join his wife.

Not a creature suspected the gulf between them, not a voice whispered evil of Dorothy, only all the guests, believing Miss Ludlow's illness dangerous, felt instinctively Cameron Hall would soon be a house of mourning; and so, by the second morning after Christmas Day, Priscilla and her brother actually sat down tête à tête to breakfast.

"Have you heard from Dorothy?" demanded the old maid. "I suppose you will start for France to-day!"

"I shall not go to St. Croix unless my wife sends for me. Miss Ludlow was never a favourite of mine. What is the matter with her? You never told me that."

Miss Priscilla looked surprised.

"It shows how much I was startled myself; for, John, I actually never asked Dorothy said her sister had sent for her, and she must go to her at once; and I was so much taken aback I never thought to ask what the illness was."

"Yet you told me it was dangerous."

"Well, it must have been, or Dorothy would never have rushed off at a minute's notice. I suppose she would get to St. Croix yesterday morning? You might hear to-day from there."

"Hardly, unless she wrote at once."

The post-bag was brought in, and the master of the house opened it, and distributed the contents.

There were several letters for his wife, and one of them had a French stamp, and was in Miss Ludlow's writing.

Sir John tore it open impulsively. A strange misgiving had seized him that Dolly could not be at St. Croix.

If Elizabeth had sent for her to come immediately, would she write to her two days later?

Sir John read his sister-in-law's letter through from beginning to end, and felt as though some evil dream troubled him.

Elizabeth wrote cheerfully, thanking Dorothy for the handsome Christmas presents that had come to St. Croix, and suggesting almost amiably that if Sir John took a yachting tour in the summer Dorothy should accompany him, and spend a few days with her own family.

From beginning to end of the letter there was no mention of illness. He put it down in blank dismay. He felt a dismal certainty that his wife had left him.

He turned to his own letters, hoping to find some clue, but there was not a line or a message from his wife.

The most interesting of the whole pile was a letter from Lord Disney, apologising for not paying his promised visit.

"The fact is," wrote the young Earl, simply, "a week before Christmas I met again the one love of my life, whom I had mourned as dead for three weary years. I was afraid to risk another parting, and we were married by special license the other day. If your wife has not told you already how interwoven my Violet's history is with hers, you must ask her for the story. I would gladly bring Violet to see you at Cameron Hall, but she would prefer that you and Lady Cameron should come to see us here. I need not say how glad I shall be to welcome you both!"

Sir John felt bewildered, but five minutes thought gave him a bright idea. Evidently, from his friend's letter, the Countess of Disney had known Dorothy well and intimately.

Might she not be able to suggest some clue to her mysterious disappearance? He could trust Gerald Disney as a brother. He must not delay another hour. If it were indeed true that Dorothy had left her home never to return, it was terrible to think she had already had a clear two days in which to hide herself from him.

She might have deceived him. She might have cared for another, but Sir John knew now he loved her too dearly to give her up. He would spend his whole life, his entire fortune, seeking her.

Lord Disney had given him the address of a very quiet private hotel at the West-end, and by a little past twelve Sir John presented himself there, and inquired for his friend. The reply was that Lord Disney had gone out, but the Countess was alone at home.

Sir John sent up his card. He was rather glad he should be able to explain his troubles to Dorothy's friend before her husband joined them.

It was a charming private sitting-room in which Lord Disney had engaged for his bride; and when the waiter had announced him and retired Sir John almost fancied he was alone in it, but from a low chair by the fire there rose a slight, graceful girl dressed in black. As her eyes met her

visitor's his were filled with an utter bewilderment.

"Good Heavens, Dorothy! What are you doing here?" he exclaimed, hoarsely, believing nothing more than that he was speaking to his wife.

The resemblance was, indeed, marvellous. It had deceived Sir John once before, for this was the girl whose conversation he had overheard at the fashionable restaurant. This was his wife's twin-sister, Violet!

It was the same golden-brown hair, the same blue eyes—the very same regularity of features, and grace of form. Apart it was, indeed, difficult not to mistake Lady Disney for Dorothy. Seen together one could notice that Violet was an inch or two taller than her sister, that she was thinner, and her beauty had a worn look, as though she had known anxiety in more forms than one.

She offered her hand to Sir John with a winning smile.

"Aren't you sorry that there exists so near a copy of your wife? But where is Dorothy, Sir John? I am longing so to see her!"

Sir John started.

"I don't understand! What does it mean?"

Violet told him her story very briefly, adding,—

"Dolly believed me dead when she married you, or I know she would have tried to find me out, and they had made her promise at home, poor child, never to mention the family disgrace. I suppose they thought a powerful baronet would not like such a mystery in his wife's family?"

Sir John understood the passage in Elizabeth's letter which had so tortured him. He understood the scene at the restaurant too.

"Yes," said Violet, slowly, "It was I you saw, Sir John. How could you have thought such cruel things of Dorothy?"

"I was mad, I think!" said the Baronet, penitently; "but you will forgive me, and help me to find her?"

Lady Disney kept silent.

"She might have told me," went on Sir John, sadly. "Why couldn't she say just one word, and make things plain?"

"Because most likely she never understood what you accused her of! I expect Dolly thought the secret you would never pardon her from keeping from you was about me! And then she is very proud, poor child!"

Sir John felt ashamed of himself.

"I was like a madman! I told her she had married me for my money!"

Violet opened her eyes.

"Sir John, how could you? Why, Dolly is just like a child in money matters. She would not mind if she had to live on dry bread so long as she was with those she loved!"

"Do you think she will ever forgive me?"

Lady Disney sighed and answered,—

"It will be time enough to think about that when you have found her."

"Two whole days gone!" groaned Sir John. "All clue to her may be lost by now."

But he was so thoroughly miserable, so desperately penitent, that Violet Disney pitied him, and tried to look on the brightest side.

"Dolly is so truthful!" she said, thoughtfully, "that I am quite sure when she left the Hall she meant just what she said."

"She said her sister had sent for her. Now, there was a letter from Miss Ludlow this morning, which proves she has not."

Violet sighed.

"Elizabeth did not send for her, but I did. I wrote and told her of our marriage, begging her as soon as she could leave home

after Christmas to come and see me. Depend upon it, Sir John, when Dorothy left your home it was with the intention of coming straight to me."

"But she never came!"

"Never!"

"What do you think?"

"I don't know what to think! When Gerald comes in I should say you ought to go to the railway station, and see if anyone answering my sister's description arrived by that train."

"Seek my wife like a fugitive!"

"How else?" asked the young Countess, sadly. "Even then the chances are against you. Think of the hundreds of people who pass through a railway station on Christmas day!"

"Her maid was with her," said Sir John, hopefully, "and she was a French woman, which seems a clue."

But, alas! Henriette appeared one evening quietly at Cameron Hall, and she had no tidings of her lady.

When they got to London Lady Cameron had told her that she should not require her attendance on the rest of the journey.

She might take a holiday, and spend a week with her sister, a milliner, with a nice little shop in the heart of London.

A liberal present had been given her, and an intimation that if her mistress was still away when she returned to the Hall the housekeeper would give her some light needlework.

Such was Hepriette's story.

She had been so enraptured with the prospect of her holiday, and the thought of escaping the crossing from Dover to Calais (like most of her class she was a miserable sailor), that she had thought nothing of her lady's dismissing her.

She left her mistress in the first-class waiting-room at Victoria station, with her Gladstone bag by her side, and she could tell no more.

Sir John's close inquiries at the station elicited two more facts. First, that the lady took a ticket for Dover, and entered the mail train; secondly, that the Dover officials declared positively they had no recollection of anyone of her description arriving at Dover. They were positive that no lady travelling alone arrived by the mail train on Christmas Day.

It was mystery on mystery. Lord Disney and his wife did their best to comfort Sir John, but they found the task beyond them. It seemed as though he could never forgive himself for his strange mistake.

The Hall was left to his sister's care, his passage in the Amazon was forfeited; he gave up all thought of going to America, and taking up his abode in chambers in London, spent all his time and thoughts on an untiring search for his lost wife.

CHAPTER V.

LADY DISNEY was quite right. Deceit was foreign to Dorothy's nature; and when she left Cameron Hall she meant to do exactly what she said, and go straight to her sister. She meant to carry out all she had told Priscilla, only the sister she meant was Violet, not Elizabeth.

Not until she was in the train, and actually only a few minutes from London, did she remember that Violet's husband, being John's closest friend, might refuse to keep her secret.

Dorothy had suffered too intensely herself to bear the thought of bringing any sorrow on her sister. Rather than be a source of difference between Violet and Lord Disney she would have gone back to St. Croix.

One by one the difficulties of her staying with the Disneys, after her husband had

learned her whereabouts, appeared. An intensely proud man, was it likely that Sir John would suffer anyone else to maintain his wife?

If he left her in her sister's care during his absence in America he would certainly insist on making some provision for her. Then, in the house of an Earl and Countess, she could not be hidden from the world. She must meet friends and acquaintances who would ask for news of her husband, and question her about his movements in America until she felt tortured.

No; if she wanted to prove to her husband she did not care for his money, if she refused to take aught else from him now he had withdrawn his love, it was not to Violet's house she must carry her aching heart.

She had formed no plans when her maid left her—absolutely none. It was the merest chance after all that decided her movements. As she kept her miserable vigil in the vast, lonely, waiting-room she felt a hand laid kindly on her arm.

"Dolly! is it possible?"

Lady Cameron looked up. There stood the English teacher of the French school, where she had been as a kind of articled pupil. Many and many a time they two had comforted each other; many and many a time Miss Brown had prevented Dorothy from imploring to be taken home, so miserable was her drudgery; and, at last, Dolly was called on to congratulate her friend, even though she might mourn her loss.

The young doctor, to whom Mary Brown's troth was plighted, had come into a legacy; the engagement, which might have had to last a good many weary years, ended at once in a happy wedding, at which Dorothy was bridesmaid, and then the young couple sailed for America, where some of the property newly come to them was situated. And that was four years ago!

Mrs. Lennox looked younger far than her thirty years, but her face had lines of sadness. It needed no questions to explain her sorrow; the deep crepe-trimmed dress and white cap inside her bonnet told her story. Dorothy knew quite well that the heaviest of all earthly sorrows had befallen her friend.

"Dolly, my dear child, what are you doing here?"

Dolly lifted her eyes to the kind, friendly face, and answered,—

"I have run away. Don't you remember, Mary, I often used to threaten to in the old days at school? Well, I've done it now, and I can never go back again!"

Mrs. Lennox looked at the rich sealskins, the velvet bonnet, and many-buttoned gloves.

"You are not a governess now, Dolly, I can see! Who is it you are running away from, dear?"

And Dorothy poured out her story. She left back nothing, not even her husband's name, or the rank of Violet's lover.

Mary Lennox listened with a wistful face. The grave had buried her hopes; nothing seemed to bring back her husband. It seemed to her, poor thing, that no trouble was great while life lasted. She stroked Dorothy's hand tenderly, and whispered,—

"It is for all time, you see, darling! And you are so young! Couldn't you bring yourself to tell Sir John he is mistaken, and that you love him dearly? Couldn't you tell him it was Mr. Ludlow and your eldest sister who made you keep that secret from him?"

Dorothy shook her head.

"You don't know John. He said I had married him for his money, and that he would never forgive me. He is going to America on the fourth of January, just to

get away from me, but I have saved him the trouble."

Mrs. Lennox changed the subject. She felt that Dorothy was near a fit of bitter weeping.

"Don't you wonder what I am doing here, Dolly? One does not often come to a railway station on Christmas Day. I have been putting one of my servants into the train. Her mother is very ill, and wanted her."

"I am going home very soon now," said Mrs. Lennox, gently. "You know I have lost my husband, but he left me a very pretty little home, and I live there still. Dear, I am quite sure you ought not to be alone, you look so tired and ill. For the sake of the old times, when I was like an elder sister to you, won't you come with me?"

A kind of yearning eagerness came into Dorothy's eyes; it was as though she had only just realised her terrible loneliness.

"Are you sure, Mary? Would you really keep me with you till I find work?"

"I will keep you gladly as long as you will stay!" said Mrs. Lennox, kindly. "Claude and I were both alone in the world. Now I have lost him, and I don't think there is any human creature who could claim relationship with me. I am living near Dover in a pretty little cottage. It will not be a grand home like the one you have left, but you shall do just as you like."

Really, the little homestead had been her husband's design, and built after his own plan on an acre of freehold ground he had purchased. It was a dear little cottage, and Mary possessed besides about four hundred a year, so that no grasping poverty could touch her.

Dorothy clung to her old friend with a caressing air of entreaty.

"Mary, you won't betray me? You won't tell John or my father, where I am?"

"I will never tell anyone unless you give me leave," answered Mary. "And now, dear, I think we should be starting."

At the last moment she slighted to ask some question of the porters, and it so happened that an official spoke afterwards to Sir John of seeing a young lady answering his description alone in the Dover train. The porters at the other end were equally correct in declaring no lady arrived there alone, for when they reached their destination Dorothy was so tired that she leaned heavily on her friend's arm, and her thick veil was drawn over her face to shield her from the night air.

A fly was waiting for Mrs. Lennox, and they soon drove the three miles to Laurel Cottage.

It was only when she was fairly inside this pleasant refuge that Dorothy's strength gave way. She sank on to a chair, buried her face in her hands, and sobbed as though her very heart would break.

"I loved him so!" she whispered, when Mrs. Lennox tried to soothe her. "And I am so young, I may have to live fifty years without him!"

Before a week had passed Mrs. Lennox regretted her promise to hide Dorothy's refuge from her husband.

The more she thought of it the more she felt certain Sir John ought at least to know that his wife was safe and with a friend.

"He has gone to America by this time," said Dorothy, when, after a little delay, Mary ventured to plead to be allowed to send just a line to the Baronet; "and you promised me to keep my secret."

"I will keep it, dear," said Mrs. Lennox, gravely, for she dreaded nothing so much as her pretty, wilful friend leaving her and trying to battle with the world; "but you must promise me something in return. That

you will stay here, and not leave Laurel Cottage without telling me?"

"I should be sure to tell you. I should like to stay here always, only that that would be living on charity, so as soon as you can find me work, Mary, I will take it."

"I don't think you are strong enough, Dolly."

"I am quite strong. And you know, Mary, I am used to teaching. After I left the pension I gave English lessons at St. Croix. I only left off when I was married."

"And when was that?"

"The first of June," said Dorothy, slowly. "Please don't talk about it, Mary. I cannot bear to think of last summer."

The first thing Dorothy required in her new home was—a name. To call her Lady Cameron would have been like sending her address to her husband; for, in a little village like Saltash, a title would have created so much excitement that it would have been widely spread.

Mary Lennox, who could not have borne to suggest to her friend to leave off her wedding-ring and call herself "Miss Ludlow," decided it would be best to speak of Dorothy simply as Mrs. Cameron. The name was not uncommon enough to attract attention, and she led such a retired life that few people besides her servants were likely to hear she had a guest.

Dorothy consented at once. She cared nothing for her title, and she rather liked keeping her own name. She seemed to Mrs. Lennox like a fragile flower broken by the storm. She went out when she was told, read and worked when it was suggested to her; but she seemed as though she did everything mechanically, and the spring had gone out of her life for ever.

Mrs. Lennox called in the doctor who had attended her husband in his last illness, and consulted him about her friend. Mr. Wilson's first inquiry was for Mrs. Cameron's husband.

"He has gone to America on business, and may be detained some months. She is an old friend of mine, and will stay with me until he can rejoin her."

"Well, I should write to him if I were you, and ask him to make haste. She is a delicate creature, and seems fretting about something. Still, the baby may rouse her."

"The baby!" exclaimed Mrs. Lennox, bewildered. "What do you mean, Mr. Wilson?"

The old doctor smiled.

"Surely you know it will be here in April or May? Depend upon it, Mrs. Lennox, her baby will do more to cheer up your friend than any nostrums I can send her!"

"Dorothy," said her hostess, very earnestly, when the great news had been discussed again and again, "you must let me send for Sir John now."

"You promised," persisted Dorothy, "and I don't want him to come!"

"Dorothy!"

"Men never care for babies," said Lady Cameron, slowly, "and John used love me. I don't think I could bear to be forgiven just for my child's sake!"

Poor Mrs. Lennox could say no more. If she persisted she might drive Dorothy from her present refuge; but one thing she resolved she would do, ascertain whether Sir John was really in America.

It was a difficult step, but she had made up her mind, and was not to be turned aside by difficulties. Going to London she went on to Cameron, drove up in a fly to the Hall, and electrified the butler by asking to see his mistress.

"Lady Cameron and I were school-fellows," she said, with a kindly smile, "and I only heard of her marriage the other day!"

The butler's respect was perfect. She felt certain he believed the story he repeated.

"I am very sorry, madam. My mistress was summoned to her sister on Christmas Day, and she has not returned from France at present. I don't know her exact address there, but all letters are sent to my master at 400, Charles Street, where he has rooms for the season."

"I thought Sir John was in America?"

"He has put off his voyage for the present, madam. Miss Priscilla is at the Hall, if you would like to see her?"

But Mrs. Lennox declined, and returned to Dover that very day, having got all the information wanted.

Dorothy never asked the object of her journey, but a few days later she whispered to her friend,—

"If I am dying you will send for John and Violet. I don't think I could die without seeing them once more, and if my baby should be a girl ask John to call her after you."

May came in with a blustering east wind, and Sir John Cameron was wondering, with a bitter pain, how it fared with his wife.

Whenever the wind had beat coldly—whenever the weather had been severe—all through that winter he had shuddered to think that her golden head might lack a shelter from the blast.

He had spent money like water. He had employed the most skilful of detectives, but to no purpose—never a clue had been discovered.

The detectives all clung to the same theory. Lady Cameron had left the mail train at the suburban junction where it was "made up," which, having only a bag of no great weight, she easily could have done.

Herne Hill, Brixton, and Clapham, all of which boast hundreds of women toiling for daily bread, and streets and streets of houses let in furnished apartments—these were the detectives "happy hunting-ground." Nothing would move them from the belief that it was here Lady Cameron was concealed.

She was poor, therefore she must work. She was a fugitive, therefore she would wish to be concealed. All workers flocked to a great centre, and nowhere could a lonely woman hide herself so utterly as in a London suburb.

The door opened slowly, and Lady Disney entered. She was his sister-in-law, and had often called in Charles Street with her husband, but never before had she come alone. Sir John seemed to know she had tidings for him before she spoke.

"Gerald is in the brougham downstairs—we want you to come to Dorothy!"

He held out his hand for the telegram she held. Violet made no effort to keep it back. She had meant to "break" the news to him, but she found the task too hard.

"From Mrs. Lennox, Laurel Cottage, Saltash, Dover, to Lady Disney, Cheriton House, Mayfair:—

"Come here at once, and bring Sir John—his wife is dying!"

Lord Disney put his wife into the brougham, and wrung John's hand in silent sympathy. He did not speak another word until they reached Victoria, and were seated in the reserve compartment he had sent his servant on to secure.

It was an awful journey. Really the train was swift enough, but it seemed to crawl to those impatient hearts.

Lord Disney had taken every precaution

to ensure haste, even telegraphing to Dover to have a carriage and pair of the fleetest horses procurable waiting.

A servant opened the little garden-gate. Lord Disney took his wife into the pretty drawing-room, but John Cameron rushed straight upstairs.

For a quarter of an hour the Earl and Countess waited in silent anxiety; then Mrs. Lennox came in, and said thankfully,

"Dorothy is asleep now. The doctor says the rest may save her life."

It was only long afterwards that Violet knew all. How Dorothy, from the moment of her danger, had declared that she could not die without seeing her husband's face; and how the strained eyes and listening ears with which she had waited his coming seemed to exhaust the last remnant of her strength. Only a few loving words from John, and her head fell on his shoulder, his first dread being that death had stolen her from him, the doctor and nurse assuring him it was only life-giving sleep.

And so the strange mistake was explained, and Dorothy's heartache ended.

When the June roses bloomed John took her and their baby son home to Cameron Hall; and if Miss Priscilla and the servants had thought Lady Cameron's six months' absence strange, they never dreamed of the real cause.

The Disneyz, Miss Lennox, a country doctor, and some celebrated detectives alone were in the secret, and they will keep their own counsel.

Dorothy herself could never remember how she and John were reconciled. She only felt he loved her better than ever. She only remembered, when death seemed near, she cared only for him; and so the clouds rolled back from their path, and they began life again together.

Lord Disney bought a property not far from Cameron Hall, and his wife often enjoys her sister's society, for the twins are as devoted to each other as of old.

Their strange resemblance puzzles many people, but Lady Disney can never jest when it is alluded to.

Even now, when she has long witnessed the perfect happiness of Dorothy and her husband, she cannot think without a shudder of the months of suffering, the bitter sorrow and pain, which came through a strange mistake.

[THE END.]

A VIGOROUS AND VIVID STORY.

Next week's complete story is entitled:

A Daring Escape.

By a well-known Author,

Every now and then the country is startled by the announcement that some poor wretched convict has made a dash for liberty. While fully realising that crime must be punished, most people silently hope that a man who has dared so much to regain his freedom will manage to elude his pursuers. The vivid story, **A Daring Escape**, recounts how Julian Tressider escaped from Dartmoor and found a friend in Stella Brookfield.

This vigorous story complete next week.

Full particulars next week of our Serial Story,

Society

THE King's engagements are so innumerable and engrossing that he will hardly be able to leave London during the remainder of the season. As Prince of Wales, his Majesty was always a great social power, and next season will conclusively prove how completely Society, in all its many ranks and grades, will be influenced and governed by the Court. His Majesty is strictly constitutional, but outside politics he is the kindest of autocrats; and this is as it should be, for the essence of Society is that it should have a recognised leader.

THE King seems absolutely indefatigable with regard to his affairs of State, and very often gets up at six o'clock in the morning to begin business. His memory for details is surprising, and one of his kind actions is to give rooms at Hampton Court Palace to one or two of the late Queen's dressers. They are not the same kind of apartments which are given to ladies of high rank and position, but suitable rooms for the purpose.

Most of the curios and relics collected by the King during his visits abroad, which have hitherto found a home either at Marlborough House or Sandringham, are being removed to Windsor Castle. His Majesty is having a small museum established in the Armoury and the Guard Chamber of the Castle, where for many years the Tipoo Sahib trophy has been housed as well as the Cellini shield commemorative of the Field of the Cloth of Gold. It may be remembered that a small museum of relics from foreign countries was got together at Windsor in the Diamond Jubilee year, and it is understood that this will still remain a separate collection.

IT is said that the latest accomplishment of the German Emperor's is bookbinding, for which he will probably find some practical use.

THERE is intense excitement in Russia about the eagerly-expected "son and heir" which has been so long in coming, the Czarina having now three daughters; and the fact that the Queen of Italy has been disappointed by an infant daughter has cast a gloom over what were hopeful auguries before.

THERE is no foundation whatever for the persistently circulated report that the Emperor William is coming to England during the summer, when, it is stated, he will visit Cowes, Windsor, and London. The whole story is a pure and simple invention. King Edward will probably pay a private visit to the German Emperor and Empress at Schloss Wilhelmshöhe, near Cassel, towards the end of August, after his stay at Homburg.

THE Secretary for War has notified to the Army that the King has selected and approved the Royal Cypher to be worn on badges, buttons and other devices throughout the Service wherever the Royal Cypher is at present borne. The Cypher consists of "E" and "R" impaled, with "VII" inserted in the lower loop of the "E," the whole surmounted by a crown, and the design has been made plain, without foliation, at his Majesty's express wish. No deviation from it whatever will be permitted, and no device or ornament will be placed above or upon it. The crown now to be adopted and to become the sealed pattern for the Army is the Tudor "Henry VII," crown, stated to have been chosen and always used by Queen Victoria personally; and all other patterns are to be abolished.

Statistics

RECORD MAKING IN LITERATURE. — The Rev. S. Baring-Gould is the most voluminous of living English writers, and according to the catalogues of the British Museum, has 140 items following his name. Andrew Lang follows with 130, and Dr. Farnival is third with 120.

The largest circulation of any work in copyright has been attained by "Enquire Within on Everything," of which 1,200,000 copies have been sold. The largest circulation of any English novel in copyright is that of "East Lynne," of which the public have bought nearly 500,000. The earliest published work still in copyright is Tennyson's "Poem by Two Brothers," which dates from 1837. The largest amount ever given for serial rights in England is 27,000, paid by Cornhill, for George Eliot's "Romola." The largest cheque ever given to an English author is £20,000, received by Lord Macaulay for his history. The most expensive single volume lately issued is Morris's "Chaucer," published at £20. The thickest single volume in print is the "Catalogue of Current Literature," which measures 10½ inches across a back. The highest price given for the first edition is 545 guineas for an uncut copy of Kilmarnock "Burns."

Gems

A YEAR of pleasure passes quickly, but a year of misfortune seems an age of pain.

If thou art a master be sometimes blind; if a servant, sometimes deaf.

The man who lives for a purpose helps give others a purpose for living.

THINGS are actually what they seem—about one time in a hundred.

BEWARE of the tyranny of custom; time gives every crab a hard shell.

It's hard to convince an honest man that the world is full of thieves.

Lots of people seem to think it bad form to be polite in public.

Marry only for Love.

No sensible, self-respecting young woman will ever think of marrying solely for gain or worldly ease. Not for a home, not for money, not for relief from work, not to help some member of your family, not even to add to your mother's comfort, is it right to marry. Work your finger-ends off for those dependent on you, do your best, but never marry for any reason but the only sufficient one—the certainty that you love a man better than anyone else in the world, better than you love yourself, and believe him to be worthy of your whole trust. One of the most pitiful mistakes young girls make in regard to marriage is the not infrequent sacrifice of themselves in the belief that they will be able to reform dissipated lives. How many broken hearts have followed mistaken efforts of this sort to save a man from drunkenness or other debasing follies, none of us can ever reckon. If, unhappily, you learn to love a man who has fallen into sins which mar his life, let him prove himself able to walk uprightly before his marriage, and not imagine that your presence will save him. Give him no pledge or promise until long and patient probation has shown that he is the conqueror of his evil inclinations. Some such faults are linked with most generous traits, and are the weaknesses of natures originally lovable to a degree, but it is worse than folly to marry such a man believing that you can ward off his enemies.

Facetiae.

QUALIFIED: "Doesn't Isabel use a good deal of face powder?" "Face powder! She ought to belong to the Plasterers' Union."

A BUSY DAY. —Winks: "I can't stop to talk, old boy. This is my busy day." Frank Friend: "Got another note to pay, eh?"

FAR BETTER RESULTS. —Julius: "Would you like to live your life over again?" Edgar: "No; but I'd like to spend over again all the money I've spent."

FORGOT TO ASK. —She: "The jeweller says the diamond in my ring is not genuine." He: "Um—er—he told me the ring was real gold. I forgot to ask him about the stone."

AFTER THE DEFALCATION. —"I understand," said the reporter, "that the defaulter's method was very simple." "Very!" said the bank official, with a sigh. "He just took the money!"

PAT'S WAY WITH TOMMY. —Tommy: "I hate to have ma whip me." Jimmy: "Aw, women can't hit hard." Tommy: "That's it; pa thinks she don't half do it, so he alius gives me some, too."

ENOUGH TO KILL. —Doctor: "I see what the matter is. All you have to do is to laugh heartily before and after each meal." Mrs. Binks: "Impossible. I get them myself, and wash the dishes."

MIGHT TRY IT. —Mrs. Binks: "Do you believe that story about a young woman swallowing a razor?" Mr. Binks: "Well, I dunno. Perhaps some one told her that razors were good for the complexion."

NOT UP TO HIS NAME. —"How much money has my husband in bank?" demanded the woman. "I cannot tell you that, madam," replied the man behind the grating. "Why, they told me you were the teller," snapped the woman.

HE MISSED THEM. —Jack's Mamma: "There were three slices of cake in the cupboard, Jack, and now there are only two. How does that happen?" Jack: "It was so dark in there, mamma, that I didn't see the others."

TRYING BOTH PLACES. —"When I get to heaven," said a woman to her Baconian husband, "I am going to ask Shakespeare if he wrote those plays." "Maybe he won't be there." "Then you ask him," said the wife.

THE LONG-EARED ANIMAL. —Jack (during their quarrel)—"Now, let me explain." May: "I want to say something first." Jack: "All right. I'm all ears." May: "I know it. No doubt that's why your parents called you 'Jack'."

NOT AT ALL PARTIAL. —She: "Your friend Mr. Flyrtman is rather partial to blondes, is he not?" He: "Quite the contrary. To my knowledge there are at least four of them now that he's equally attentive to—shows no partiality, in fact."

REASON ENOUGH. —Wilkins: "Why are you so excited over the prospect of an international yacht race? You don't know a catboat from a cutter." Wilkins: "No, but I have a nautical friend who always tells me which way to bet."

CHEAP MUSIC. —Fair customer: "Have you a piece called the 'Moonlight Sonata?'" Clerk: "Yes, madam—'Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata.' Here it is." "What's the price?" "Only—" "Oh, that's too cheap. Show me something better."

KNEW HER HUSBAND. —Mother: "Is your letter to your husband ready to post?" Married Daughter: "It's all done excepting the postscript, telling him to send me some more money. I'm looking for another sheet of paper." "Write it across the lines." "No, indeed. He'll pretend he couldn't read it."

A PRACTICAL ADVISER. —Miss Romancie: "Oh, I just adore music." Old Baldie: "You play, I believe." Miss Romancie: "Play and sing, both. What sort of a man ought a woman who loves music to marry?" Old Baldie: "Well—or—I really can't say; a deaf one, I suppose."

GAVE HIM WARNING. —Western Judge: "Why did you kill long Jack?" Hair-Trigger Ike: "He was a bad man, y'r honor, an' it was a case o' chaw or be chawed." Judge: "Did you give him any warning before you shot him?" Hair-Trigger Ike: "Oh, yes, y'r honor. I told him to hold up his hands."

TWO LAWYERS. —First Lawyer (angrily): "I've a good mind to sue you." Second Lawyer: "I shouldn't like anything better. There's only one trouble about two lawyers going to law. A lawyer can never do himself justice when he pleads his own case." First Lawyer: "That's easily fixed. I'll plead your case, and you plead mine."

A LATTER-DAY MARRIAGE. —Downton: "So you are really going to be married?" Upton: "Yes; it's all fixed. We've rented a furnished flat, and I've hired a dress suit for the occasion, and Marie has borrowed her cousin's wedding ring, and a new caterer has agreed to lend us his plaster-of-paris show-cake, provided I mention his name in the papers."

HIS FIRST DRINK. —Miss Goodsole: "Poor man! I suppose the craving for liquor was born in you. Or, perhaps, you were led to drink against your will." Wraxton Tatlers: "Dat's right, lady; so I was. De furst time I ever took a swaller o' gin I cried like a baby." "Did you, indeed?" "Yes'm. I wuz on'y six months old, an' had de colic."

LOVED A RAT. —Prison Missionary: "Ah, you have a pet, I see." Convict: "Yes—this rat. I feeds him every day. I think more o' that ere rat than any other livin' creature." Missionary: "Ah, in every man there's something of the angel left, if one can only find it. How came you to take such a fancy to that rat?" Convict: "He bit th' keeper."

THE SAME OLD SHADES. —A party of Americans were sitting on the upper deck of a Rhine River boat. One was reading aloud from a guide-book about the various castles. As the boat was passing one of the finest old buildings, a woman in the party exclaimed to her companions: "Why that old castle is inhabited. See—there are blinds at the windows." "No," said a man standing by her side, "those are the shades of their ancestors."

AVOIDING A SCENE. —Wife: "Did you tell that girl she'd got to go at once?" Husband: "I did, and she says she won't. Shall I call a policeman?" Wife: "Mercy! no! The idea! Our names would be in all the papers. I'll get rid of her." Husband: "You? How can you?" Wife: "I'll tell her you are a brute, and want to send her away to save expense, although I'm sick, and will actually suffer without her. Then she'll go."

CHECK TO THE BISHOP. —Archbishop Temple admits that he is devoid of musical graces, and relates that he was once occupying a seat as an ordinary worshipper in a country church, his immediate left-hand neighbour being a country yokel, who kept turning angry glances towards the bishop—as he then was—in evident depreciation of his lordship's vocal efforts. The bishop, however, continued making what he described as "a joyful noise," until at last the yokel disgustedly closed his book, and, turning to the bishop, remarked, "I say, guv'nor, chuck it! You're spoilin' the whole bloom-in' show!"

A GOLDEN DESTINY.

By the author of "Redeemed by Fate," "The Mistress of Lynwood," &c.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

The father of Harold, Viscount St. Croix, is anxious that he should take as his wife Ermengarde Seymour, niece of Sir Travers Leigh. Harold goes down to Woodleigh Court for the purpose of proposing to Ermengarde, but circumstances prevent him doing so. An adjoining house has the reputation of being haunted, and in his endeavours to fathom the mystery, Harold meets Irene Duval, the girl he befriended one night in London while strolling on the Embankment.

Anthony Wyndham, the owner of Wyndham Abbey, and Sir Travers Leigh are neighbours. Marjorie Wyndham has fallen in love with Roy Fraser, a penniless architect, and keeps the news from her father. Suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, information reaches Mr. Wyndham that he is not the rightful owner of the Abbey but one Geoffrey Wyndham. This Geoffrey, while producing the best evidence that he is the person entitled to enjoy the Wyndham estates, is suspected. Marjorie resents his indecent haste to gain her father's consent to their marriage.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOWEVER relieved Marjorie's conscience might have been at the idea of having no clandestine correspondence with Roy Fraser, it cannot be said that she felt altogether happy at his continued silence, and therefore it was with a joyfully beating heart and heightened colour that she found a letter on her dressing-table when she got home, in a handwriting which she knew to be his.

There was no danger of her letters being seen by her father when they came by the afternoon post, and it was doubtless for this reason that Roy had timed its arrival by the second delivery.

She dismissed her maid, locked her door, and then sat down to read her welcome missive, first of all covering the envelope with shy kisses, and pressing it to her heart as if it had been a sentient thing, conscious of her caresses.

How she loved Roy! How dear he was to her! Dearer a thousand times than she had ever confessed to him!

Then she tore it open, and read its contents—once, twice, three times!

As she read the soft rose flush faded from her cheek, the lovelight died from her eyes, her whole demeanour underwent a change, and the lips which had been tremulous with a happy smile grew white and rigid, for, instead of the words of affection she had naturally expected, she read what follows :

"MY DEAR MISS WYNDHAM,—Since our last interview, and my knowledge of your changed position I have been thinking over our semi-engagement, and have come to the conclusion that it is a great mistake, and the sooner it is put an end to the better it will be for both of us.

"I, as you know, am not in a position to keep a wife, for my income is very small, and there is no prospect of its getting larger for some little time.

"Of course, when you were an heiress it was a very different matter, as your money would have been sufficient for both of us; but now that you are, as regards finances, no better off than myself, I feel it would be selfish towards you and unjust to your trustee interests if I were to ask you to hold yourself bound to me.

"I hope you will not judge too harshly of my conduct or think I have behaved badly in thus releasing you, but I assure you, my

dear Miss Wyndham, that it is as much for your good as my own, and in after years you will be quite ready to confess it.

"I am older than you, and know the world better than you do, and experience has taught me that 'love in a cottage' is a theory which fails when reduced to practice.

"I, at least, should be afraid of trying the experiment, and I am unwilling that you should run the risk either. In bidding you farewell, I wish you all the happiness that I know you deserve, and subscribe myself yours very sincerely,

"ROY FRASER."

Poor Marjorie! For some time she could not realise what was meant, but as comprehension broke upon her she grew still paler and paler, and her form became as rigid as if it had been carved from a block of marble.

This, then, was the end of Roy's ardent protestations, his vows of love, and promises of faith!

It was her fortune he had cared for, not herself, and when he found that the fortune was in jeopardy he had wisely withdrawn, so as to run no risk of being burdened with a penniless bride!

And she had thought him so noble, so honourable, and disinterested—so far above all mercenary consideration!

Suddenly she sprang to her feet, and, throwing the letter on the ground, stamped upon it in a passionate access of angry indignation.

"I will not weep for the loss of such a lover; rather should I rejoice that I have escaped his clutches, even if I lose my inheritance as well!" she exclaimed aloud; and then, as if to give her the lie, a storm of tears fell from her eyes, and sobs shook her frame—great anguished sobs, such as her young life had never known before.

When she grew a little calmer she took up the letter and read it again, and, as she read, the remembrance of Roy's manly face and brave bearing came upon her.

She recalled his words of love and the truthfulness that had been in his grey eyes when he uttered them, and a doubt assailed her whether, after all, the letter could be his or was only a forgery.

She examined it again, animated by this hope; but, alas! there was no room for doubt, for the writing was certainly his, and his signature was too peculiar a one to be imitated.

"And I would have been true to him—aye, faithful even unto death!" she exclaimed aloud, in the bitterness of her humiliation. "It would have mattered nothing to me whether he was rich or poor, of good repute or ill repute, so long as he loved me. (Oh, Roy, Roy!)

Presently pride came to her aid, and she rose and bathed her face and eyes so as to take from them all traces of tears; then she locked up in her desk the letter that had brought her such a cruel disenchantment, and changed her dress herself, not daring to send for her maid to help her, conscious that that young person's keen eyes would have quickly discovered that she had been crying.

After this she went downstairs into the drawing-room, where the Squire and Geoffrey were awaiting her before going in to dinner.

"By the way, Marjorie, I saw a friend of yours yesterday afternoon, and forgot to tell you about it," observed her father.

"Indeed," listlessly. "Who was it?"

"Can't you guess?"

"No," she returned, taking up a fan of peacock feathers and holding it between her face and the light.

It was lucky for her that she had taken this precaution, for the Squire's next words were calculated to try her self-control.

"It was that young architect whom we both liked so much, Roy Fraser."

The peacock's fan trembled, but Marjorie said nothing, although she was miserably conscious that Geoffrey's eyes were upon her.

"Yes," went on the Squire; "I was passing the lodge when who should come out but young Fraser and Mrs. Fanning. I suppose they are friends—at any rate, they seemed to be talking very earnestly together, and when they saw me both looked very much confused. Not that they need have minded," added the Squire, with a chuckle. "I was young myself once, and haven't forgotten my love-making days."

"Do you think they were making love, then?" asked Geoffrey; and Marjorie felt actually grateful to him for filling up a pause which she herself would have been incapable of breaking.

Looked uncommonly like it. Her hand was on his arm, and he was looking down into her eyes."

"A lover-like attitude, certainly," laughed Geoffrey. "Did you get a good view of the lady's face?"

"Yes, very good; and, by Jove! she is an extremely handsome woman! Dark and foreign-looking, but with magnificent eyes. My impression is she must be a Spaniard."

"Very likely," responded the younger man, with indifference. "Spanish women are very handsome when they are young, but they don't wear well. For my part, I think there is no beauty to beat that of English women, and, what is greatly to the point, it lasts longer than any other."

He emphasised the compliment with a glance at Marjorie, but, as her eyes were bent on the ground, it passed unobserved.

"I expect," said the Squire, pursuing his train of thought, "that it was Fraser who told Mrs. Fanning about the Lodge, and, if so, the mystery of her coming and taking a house in such an out-of-the-way spot, is partly explained. It is quite clear she must have had some motive for burying herself alive in that damp little cottage."

"Women are strange creatures," observed Geoffrey, philosophically. "They are just as likely to do odd things from no reason at all as from the clearest and most powerful motives. Perhaps, however, she and Mr. Fraser are going to be married soon, and wish to keep the affair quiet. I heard from one of the gamekeepers that the lady had not been left a widow long, and, maybe, she wishes to prevent her friends from seeing how soon she throws off her weeds."

The entrance of the butler announcing dinner created a welcome diversion, so far as Marjorie was concerned; but although she contrived to answer when she was spoken to, and otherwise behave herself as usual, her brain was in a tumult, and she was longing intensely for the conclusion of the meal, when she would be able to get away, and think over what she had heard.

Not for a moment did she doubt the truth of what her father had said—he was too upright and honourable a man to have told, or even countenanced, a lie, no matter what the temptation might have been.

"How pale you are, Marjorie!" exclaimed the Squire; "and you are not eating anything. Aren't you well?"

"Oh, yes, no, not quite well," she rejoined, incoherently.

"Yes, no, not quite well! Now, what may

Next Week's Complete Story is Vigorous and Vivacious.



"I LOVE YOU SO DEARLY THAT I WOULD MAKE ANY SACRIFICE FOR YOUR SAKE!" SAID GEOFFREY, HIS VOICE INSTINCT WITH REAL FEELING.

that mean?" he said, comically. "Reduced into plain English, does it signify you have a headache?"

"Something like that," returned the girl, with a faint smile, and seizing on the excuse as gladly as a drowning man catches hold of a straw.

She felt grateful to Geoffrey that he did not persecute her with inquiries, but he was a man of very considerable tact, and was quite aware that in this case silence would help him most.

After dinner she went into the grounds, and seated herself under the tulip tree in the rose-garden, pushing her hair back from her brows so that the soft evening breezes might cool her heated temples. Overhead the star flowers had blossomed into silvery beauty, in the blue meadows of the sky, and a young crescent moon was visible above the treetops. An evening silence reigned over the house and gardens, broken only by the falling of the water in the marble basin of the fountain, where it plashed musically amongst the broad, green, lily leaves.

Could the Squire's idea be true, and was Roy really in love with the mysterious lady who had taken the Lodge? Perhaps it was for her sake the young man had broken off his engagement, and rather than confess how his fickle fancy had roved, he had preferred to attribute the change to Marjorie's prospective loss of fortune.

The girl recalled Mrs Fanning's words,—

"Your love is false, false, false!"

Had those words been spoken in ignorance or was she aware of the relations that had existed between her and the young architect? If the latter, then her warning had been made with a distinct purpose in view, and her strange desire to see Marjorie's face was also explained.

The girl groaned aloud in her humiliation. That she, who had been so proud and cold to her other wooers, who had come down from her pedestal to tell a man—very much her social inferior—that she loved him, and was willing to sacrifice wealth, position, everything, for his sake; that she should have her love flung back in her face, while he calmly transferred his affections to another woman, was an idea that nearly maddened her.

Acting on an impulse, she went into the library, and took a sheet of paper on which she wrote her reply to his letter.

"I release you from every promise you ever made me, and I earnestly hope I shall never see you again."

This she signed, put into an envelope, and then went into the hall, and slipped it into the post-bag, which was taken to the Squire every evening to be sealed, but at whose contents it was very unlikely he would glance.

As she turned away she nearly came into collision with Geoffrey, who was crossing the hall from the dining-room.

"I been your pardon," he said, laughing at the *contretemps*. "I was just going out into the garden to find you. Will you take a turn with me under the starlight?"

She acquiesced, listlessly, more because it seemed easier to accept than to refuse, and he, with a tender care—which she was too unobservant of to resent—wrapped round her a fleecy wool shawl which was lying on the hall stand.

"Precious things are scarce," he observed, as they went out, and down the steps into the rose-garden, where the air was laden with the scent of the drowsy, dew-wet flowers, and the moonlight glanced

with an opaline radiance, athwart the water of the fountain.

"What a lovely night!" he observed. "We don't get many like it in this foggy England, and so it behoves one to take advantage of it. Miss Marjorie," he changed his tone suddenly, and came to a full stop in front of her. "I can see that you are, for some reason, unhappy, and I cannot tell you what pain the knowledge gives me. Will you for once treat me as a friend—a brother—and let me help you?"

She shook her head, with rather a bitter smile.

"You cannot help me. No one can help me!"

Then, recollecting herself, she added, quickly, and with a forced gaiety that was infinitely sad,—

"It is not possible to assist anyone in bearing a very bad headache, is it?"

"No, but it is possible to share a headache, and in doing so, render it the more easily borne," he rejoined. "Forgive me if I intrude my sympathy, but I was fearing that your trouble might be due to the fact of the Squire being turned out of his old home."

Certainly Mr. Geoffrey Wyndham was a most consummate liar, and an excellent actor, for nothing could have been more respectfully subdued than his voice and manner.

"And," he continued, without giving her time to speak, "I want to reassure you on that point, and to show you a way by which all difficulties may be smoothed over, and your father's position rendered perfectly safe. May I ask for your undivided attention for a quarter of an hour?"

Marjorie, somewhat surprised at the

tone the conversation was assuming, signified her assent by an aquiescent nod; and thereupon he led her, strangely enough, to the very seat beneath the tulip tree which she had occupied a quarter of an hour ago.

"I will not deny that my first intention was to take possession of the estates, and become sole master of them at once," he began, watching her fair face, which the moonlight illuminated, as he spoke; "and it is unnecessary to tell you that as it is perfectly impossible to resist my claim, your father would have had no alternative but to give them up when I chose to demand them. Since my arrival here, an influence has been at work which I am powerless to resist, and which may have the effect of altering all my plans. In three words I can give you a summary of that influence, and they are—I love you!"

CHAPTER XVII.

As Geoffrey made his declaration, Marjorie half rose from her seat, with a gesture of indignation, but he put a detaining hand on her arm.

"Do you mean to insult me, sir?" she demanded, with the air of hauteur he had grown to know so well.

"Insult you! No. A man never insults a woman by telling her he loves her, or by asking her to become his wife. On the contrary, he pays her the highest compliment it is in his power to bestow."

"It is a compliment I must beg to decline, then," said the young girl, shaking herself free from his clasp, and standing before him, tall, fair, and pale in the moonlight.

"Do you mean, then, that you refuse me?"

"I do mean it, most distinctly."

"Ah!" Geoffrey drew a long breath. "I cannot say that your answer surprises me, for I hardly expected it would be different; and it seemed very probable that I should have to explain matters to you before you would see that you were taking a wrong view of them."

"Nothing that you could say would alter my decision."

"Wait a minute, if you please, fair cousin. First of all, let me tell you that your father is perfectly aware of my affection for you, and would readily consent to your marrying me—nay, it is his ardent desire that you should become my wife."

Marjorie grew paler, and her lips trembled a little.

"Is this true?"

"Quite true, as he will tell you, if you ask him."

"I shall not ask him. It is not necessary to refer to the subject again, seeing that nothing would induce me to marry you."

"Don't commit yourself to rash assertions," said Geoffrey, with a slow laugh, that jarred discordantly on her ear. "Perhaps, after you have heard all I have to say, you may not be quite so positive. I have told you I loved you, and my one great object in life, if I became your husband, would be to make you happy; but pray understand that I am a man of some determination, who has generally succeeded in getting what he wanted, and who is now resolved that he will make you his wife. I tell you this in order that you may not think too harshly of his method of wooing. Well, then, to come to the point, the situation is just this. If you marry me I shall execute a deed by which your father shall be left in possession of the Wyndham estates during his life, and no one will ever know that he is not the rightful owner; but if, on the other hand, you persist in your refusal, I shall take possession of them myself, and you and your father will be homeless and penniless."

It was, as he observed, a strange kind of wooing, and for a moment Marjorie looked at him in silence, infinite scorn lighting the depths of her lustrous eyes, and curling her scarlet lips.

"Do you think I am the sort of girl to yield to threats?" she asked, contemptuously.

"No," he returned, with an air of quiet conviction; "but I think that your filial love will prove greater than your selfish inclination, and you will yield for your father's sake, when you would not for your own."

Something either in his words or the tranquil assurance with which they were uttered struck her with a sense of inquietude, and her eyes fell, while her fingers twined themselves nervously in and out of each other.

Geoffrey saw the advantage he had gained, and pursued it.

"I am aware that in thus bringing outside pressure to bear upon you I run the risk of making you despise me, but you really leave me no alternative. I need not bring forward any arguments to convince you of my motives being perfectly disinterested, for your father has confessed that his solicitors declare that he has not the shadow of a chance of gaining his cause if he goes to law with me, as they are convinced my claim is just, and so you see that I am really entreating a penniless bride. But I love you, Marjorie"—his voice changed, and became instinct with real feeling—"I love you so dearly that I would make any sacrifice for your sake!"

"Except the one which would be of any use to me!" she rejoined, bitterly. "Oh!" she threw out her hands with a gesture of intense scorn, "I had no idea a man could be so base, so mean, as you have proved yourself!"

"You must think of me as you will now; but if you will only give me a chance, the future shall prove how mistaken your present judgment is."

"I hope that in the future I shall have no sort of connection with you!" she exclaimed. "Your arguments and sophistries have been of no avail. Do what you will—I will never become your wife!"

She was turning away when she came to a sudden pause, for there, a few yards before her, stood the Squire, who had come out in search of her.

"Marjorie, my dear, come indoors, and give me some music," he said, advancing nearer. "Ah! Geoffrey, is that you?"

"It is, sir."

"I was not aware you were here. I thought that, as a rule, you objected to the night air?"

"So I do, as a rule; but all rules have their exceptions, and this evening I wanted particularly to speak to your daughter."

His tone was so significant that it seemed to convey some meaning to the Squire, who glanced inquiringly from him to Marjorie.

"What has happened?" he asked, in a lowered tone.

"This. I have made an offer to Miss Marjorie."

"And she?"

"Has refused me."

Marjorie looked up with some anxiety, and she saw her father's face cloud over as if with disappointment.

"Still," went on Geoffrey, "I shall not take this decision as final, and I shall put my question again in a week's time, when I shall hope for a favourable answer. Perhaps you, sir"—he turned to the Squire significantly—"may be able to persuade your daughter to look more kindly on my suit."

And with this he walked quietly away, leaving father and daughter alone in the moonlight.

For some minutes neither spoke; then the Squire, taking Marjorie's small, cold hand between his, said, in an agitated voice,—

"Can you not make up your mind to like him, my child? I believe he is truly fond of you."

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed the girl, throwing herself on his breast. "He cannot be fond of me, or he would not try to coerce me."

The Squire sighed deeply. He felt himself in a most difficult situation, for on the one hand he had no desire to force Marjorie's inclinations, and on the other he could see no way out of the dilemma unless she became Geoffrey's wife.

"Papa," said Marjorie, who seemed intuitively to read his thoughts, "is there no doubt that he is the heir?"

"No doubt at all, my dear."

"And is what he says true—namely, that your solicitors refuse to support you if he brings a law-suit against you?"

"Quite true."

There was a pause, during which Marjorie found herself watching the play of the moonlight on the glossy laurel foliage, and wondering how it was the roses and mimosa smelt so much sweeter at night than in the daytime. Her brain seemed almost dazed under the strain that the events of the last few hours had put upon it.

"Tell me this, papa," she said, at length, and her voice sounded harsh and unnatural. "Shall we have any money at all of our own if this man fulfills his threat and takes the estates?"

"None at all—not a penny piece more than he likes to give us. Oh, Marjorie! I had been hoping that you could—would have grown to care for him, and then our inheritance need never have passed away from us!"

A shudder of repulsion thrilled through the girl's frame, but the Squire was too agitated by his own thoughts to observe it.

He had no intention of bringing undue influence to bear upon her—would have scorned the idea, indeed; but it was hard for him to draw the line between his own desires and her free will.

When we grow old, love seems a very slight and trivial thing compared with what it did in our youth; and the Squire did not look upon it as a necessary accompaniment of matrimony.

It seemed to him that if she did not actually dislike Geoffrey there was no reason why she should not marry him, and thus preserve the position to which she had been born.

"It is hard to face poverty at my age—very, very hard," he muttered, unconsciously speaking aloud; and Marjorie heard the words, and understood the line of thought that had prompted them.

No entreaties that he could have uttered would have moved her as did that spoken soliloquy, for she saw that he was constraining himself not to influence her more than he could help.

As has already been said, she was devotedly attached to her father, and had been all her life.

It seemed easy to make for him a sacrifice that nothing would have induced her to make for herself, especially when she saw in what direction his wishes were tending, and yet—even as the words of self-renunciation trembled on her lips they died away unuttered.

"Let me think," she said, sitting down, and leaning her aching head on her hand. "Don't go away, papa, and I will try and decide what I had better do."

For fully half-an-hour she sat there quite

still and as immovable as a statue, while a struggle, whose agony no words can ever describe, went on within her.

She knew that, badly as Roy Fraser had behaved to her, she still loved him better than anyone else in the wide world, and that if he had been true to her, not even for her father would she have sacrificed him.

But he had not been true to her. He had, in plain English, jilted her for the sake of some other woman whom he cared for more; and he made no disguise of the fact that it was Marjorie's fortune which had attracted him, although at their last interview he had indignantly denied that it would make any difference to his feelings or affection.

Well, it was quite clear that she would never care for anyone else again, and, this being the case, did it matter much whom she married?

If she had her choice, she would prefer marrying no one at all, but when the choice lay before her, whether her father should be driven forth from his boyhood home, penniless and miserable, to face the world in his old age, surely it was her duty to save him from such a fate!

"Papa," she said at last, and she spoke very quietly and, as it seemed, with a total absence of emotion, "I have made up my mind."

"Well?" as she paused.

"I answered Geoffrey Wyndham too hurriedly; and if he puts the same question to me again, I shall give a different reply."

"You will accept him?"

"Yes," in the same dull, quiet tone.

"Oh, Marjorie! if you could but know what a load you have lifted from my mind!" exclaimed the squire, catching her in his arms, and kissing her pale lips over and over again. "I could not force you, but it would have been terrible if we had had to go forth as strangers from the home where you were born. I am not so young now as I was once, and less able to bear troubles. I think, my dear, it would have killed me."

He was so overcome with emotion that he had to sit down, but Marjorie said never a word.

"Geoffrey loves you, he will be good to you, I am sure," pursued her father, eagerly, "and in time you will get to like him. I did not care for him at first, it is true; but I was prejudiced, and now I think him a good fellow, and a pleasant fellow into the bargain. Oh, I am sure he will make you happy—sure of it!"

And still Marjorie said nothing.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It is now time to return to Irene, who, as we have seen, had left the Dower House on the very morning of her interview with Lord St. Croix, accompanied by Mrs. Henry, or, in other words, Mrs. Seymour's maid, Sumner.

She had been given no time for preparation, but this would have been no great inconvenience in itself as she had no luggage to get ready; her wardrobe, which was of the scantiest possible description, having been left behind in her hasty flight from the convent.

Indeed, Mrs. Henry made this an excuse for taking her away, but it must be confessed that she was astonished at the reluctance manifested by the young girl to leave the Dower House.

"I want to take you up to London, in order to buy some clothes for you," she said; "and as we have not very much time to catch the train, you must put your things on as quickly as possible."

"Are we coming back to-night?" questioned Irene, with a slight flush.

"I don't know. It is possible, but I cannot say for certain. Why?" added the woman, with a sharp glance of suspicion. "Do you want particularly to come back to-night?"

"Oh, no!"

"It seems to me you have grown reconciled to this place," said Mrs. Henry, still watching her, as she put on her hat and cloak. "And yet it must be duller than the convent, for there, at least, you had girls of your own age to speak to."

Irene did not answer. It would have been difficult to explain the reasons that had made her grow to like her solitary residence; and, besides, there was not much time for conversation, for Mrs. Henry was evidently in a fever of impatience that they should be gone.

They rowed across the lake to the other side, and then, after ten minutes' walk through the plantation, found themselves in the high road, where a closed fly was waiting.

Into this they got, and were driven rapidly away until they came to Blackminster Station, and there Mrs. Henry took tickets for London—taking care, however, that she did not loose Irene's arm until they were safely in the railway-carriage.

"Find us a compartment to ourselves, and lock the door when we are in!" she whispered to the guard; and that functionary, rendered very obsequious by the half-crown pressed into his hand, did as he was desired.

Mrs. Henry sank back against the cushions—for they were in a first-class carriage—with a sigh of relief, as if an arduous and disagreeable duty were nearly done.

"There!" she exclaimed, as the train moved slowly out of the station, "now we are safe from observation, and you may remove your veil if you like."

It should be mentioned that before leaving the island she had produced a thick black gossamer fall, which she had tied over the girl's face, and on permission being given her, Irene gladly raised it.

As she did so an idea seemed to strike her, and she said, with some curiosity,—

"Why are you afraid of anyone seeing me?"

"Who told you I was afraid of anyone seeing you?" was Mrs. Henry's counter question, while she bit her lip with annoyance at the girl's penetration.

"Your own actions," tranquilly responded Irene, who was too fearless and innocent to attempt any disguise. "Evidently you were afraid of my being seen at the Dower House, and equally afraid when we left it, otherwise you would not have made me put on that horrid veil."

Mrs. Henry was silent. It was difficult to answer such questions as these, and, to her relief, Irene did not seem inclined to press her inquiries, but lay back in her corner, dreamily watching the landscape as it flitted past.

It was not an agreeable day. Heavy clouds of a dull, leaden hue hung low in the air, and a drizzling rain presently began to fall, blotting out the trees and fields in a flying mist, that made even the railway-carriage feel damp and uncomfortable."

"You are very meditative," observed Mrs. Henry, at last, when more than half their journey was accomplished. "What are you thinking of?"

Irene aroused herself with a start.

"I was wondering," she said, slowly, "whether there were many girls with lives like mine! If there are I am sorry for them."

"Why?"

"Because there must be good things in life, and they have missed them. I am not grumbling—I do not even wish to complain—but I have heard of such things as mother's love and a father's devotion, and home ties, which must be very sweet to those that possess them. I know nothing of these things, but I have often dreamed of them."

As she said, she was not grumbling, and there was no fretfulness in the sweet, tranquil voice—only a mournful cadence that was infinitely pathetic.

Mrs. Henry's brows contracted. Did her conscience give her a twinge as she thought of all the happiness from which she had helped to snatch this fair young life?

Perhaps so. Few of us are so hardened as not to have occasional moments of repentance. Alas! that they vanish so quickly!

She did not speak again until they reached Paddington, which looked gloomier and grimier, and more desolate than usual, in the clinging dampness of the small, fine rain.

Here Mrs. Henry took a cab, and they drove to the Army and Navy Stores, where she bought several articles of clothing for her charge, all of a scrupulously plain description.

Irene watched the purchases without manifesting any particular degree of interest. Like all girls of her age, she liked pretty things; but these were not pretty things, and the prospect of wearing them gave her no pleasurable anticipations.

After the shopping was concluded, they had dinner at the stores, and then got into another cab, taking with them the trunk containing the clothing, and were again driven through the London streets. In giving the cabman directions where to go, Mrs. Henry had lowered her voice, so that Irene did not hear their destination.

From Victoria Street they drove along the Embankment and passed the very spot where she had first met and spoken to St. Croix. The remembrance came upon her with vivid distinctness, followed by a rush of gratitude for the kindness he had then and since showed her.

Perhaps it was because she was so occupied with these reminiscences, that she did not pay particular attention to where they were being driven. She only knew that, on leaving the Embankment, they passed through crowded city streets, where men were hurrying to and fro, and great buildings loomed up, tall and smoke-darkened, into the grey sky.

Then came a long, straight road which seemed interminable; the buildings grew dingier, the people they passed looked paler and more poorly dressed; in effect, they were in the East-end of the city, and when they stopped it was before a small semi-genteel sort of house, facing a brick wall, and not far off the docks.

"What place is this?" Irene asked, shrinking back with a very natural movement of repugnance as she descended from the cab, while Mrs. Henry paid the cabman—liberally as it seemed, for he drove off with a satisfied expression of countenance.

"It is the house of a friend of mine who has kindly asked me to stay the night," replied Mrs. Henry, ringing the bell. "I am too fatigued to bear the journey back home."

The door was opened by a woman of about the speaker's own age, not a pleasant-looking person by any means. Her cheeks were pale and bloated, and her eyes had the dull, fishy expression of one to whom strong drink is not a stranger.

"Hullo, Maria, is it you?" she exclaimed, with a grip of the hand. "Why, it's years since I saw you, and you ain't

altered a bit. Why, you're quite a swell! Blest if you ain't. And who's this young female, if I may make so bold?"

"It is my niece, Irene!"

"I did not know as you had got a niece. Howsoever, she's welcome. How d'ye do, my dear? Come in, come in."

Irene yielded her hand with some compunction, and a slight shiver of disgust, but followed Mrs. Henry into the front parlour—a room that smelt as if its windows had not been opened for the last twelve months or so, but which was evidently regarded by its mistress with much pride.

A carpet of gaudy blue and red covered the floor, in the fireplace was a wonderful arrangement of curled white and green paper, with a spray of paper flowers trailing across. The looking-glass, also, was wreathed round with cut green paper, and the mantelpiece adorned with shells and sandal wood boxes, apparently brought from "foreign parts."

A parrot, in a large cage, stood in the window, and began shrieking loudly at the visitors.

"Be quiet, do!" exclaimed the hostess, flipping the cage with a duster, a manœuvre that was cleverly evaded by the parrot, who was apparently used to it, and whom a long practice at dodging had made well-nigh perfect in the accomplishment.

"I never see such a bird in all my life, he's screaming for everlasting. Sit down Maria, sit down, miss. What will you have?"

This last inquiry was addressed to Mrs. Henry, who answered the query by saying,—

"A cup of tea, please."

"A cup of tea!" repeated the mistress of the house, with some scorn. "Well, that ain't much to have after a journey, but you must do as you like. I'm not a going to press you against your will. And the young person won't she have something short either?"

"She will have a cup of tea, too, please," replied Mrs. Henry, hastily, "but we should like to go upstairs and take our things of first, if you have no objection. I suppose you had my letter, and have prepared the room for us?"

"Certainly, and if you go upstairs, and take the first to the right, you'll find it. While you're away I'll make the tea."

"Are we going to stay here all night, then?" asked Irene, when they had mounted the dark, narrow staircase, and taken the "first to the right," which brought them into a stuffy little bedroom.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Henry, sharply. "Have you any objection to our doing so?"

"No; only it does not seem a very nice place," said the girl, with her usual gentleness. "What is the name of the person downstairs?"

"Marlow."

"And she is a friend of yours?"

Mrs. Henry winced under the question, as if she fancied veiled satire had prompted it.

"She is an acquaintance, but I have not seen her for a long time—many years, in fact."

"Did she know my mother?"

"No."

"I am glad of that," the young girl said, and they then descended to the parlour—their nostrils greeted by the strong and penetrating odour of fried herrings.

"I'm just cooking a bloater or two by way of a relish for tea," observed Mrs. Marlow, appearing with a very red face, and a table-cloth flung over her arm. Traversing about London is tiring work, and you are fine and hungry, I'm sure. Bless me, if there ain't Jim!"

This last remark was occasioned by the opening of the front door, and the appearance of a tall, rather good-looking young man of about thirty, with a sunburnt face, and a heavy beard and moustache, who shook hands with Mrs. Henry, and stopped short, as if very much astonished, at the appearance of Irene.

And indeed, the young girl looked strangely incongruous and out of place in that gaudy little sitting-room between the two women who were her companions; and if the newcomer had been poetic (which he was not) he might have compared her to some fair, slender lily, rising up out of the mud and slime of a slow flowing river.

"This is my niece—the young woman I wrote to you about," said Mrs. Henry, as an introduction, and Marlow made an awkward sort of a movement, which, by a stretch of imagination, might have been interpreted as a bow.

"Shake hands with her, why don't you?" observed his mother, jocosely. "She's no fine lady that you need be so distant, and I don't suppose she would even object to a kiss, if so be you cared to give her one."

But the young man was wiser than his mother, for there was a flash in the blue loveliness of Irene's eyes which warned him not to take a liberty with her, and he was sensible enough to heed the warnings.

"Mother's always ready with her joke," he remarked to Mrs. Henry, in a half apologetic tone; then, turning to Irene, "you needn't be afraid, miss; she means nothing by it."

"And if she did mean anything by it, what of that, I should like to know?" demanded the hostess in a shrill voice, and with an angry scowl. "You're good enough to kiss the likes of her, surely! For all her golden hair, and her haughty ways, I'm as good as Maria Summer any day, and by the same token you're as good as her niece!"

Poor Irene looked, as she felt, considerably alarmed at this outburst, for in spite of the strange vicissitudes she had lately gone through, it had not yet fallen to her lot to be thrown amongst vulgar people, and she did not know how much—or rather how little—meaning was to be attached to their words.

However, the good lady's tempestuous remarks were allowed to pass in silence, and she speedily regained her equilibrium, and went into the kitchen, from which she presently appeared, bearing a dish of smoking bloaters in one hand, and the teapot in the other.

"Come now, draw up!" she said, seating herself at the head of the table; and accordingly they "drew up," and she paid Irene the compliment of asking how preferences lay in the direction of bloaters. "A hard rood 'un, my dear, or a soft rood 'un?"

Poor Irene shook her head, without the faintest idea of what the question signified, and announced her preference for the plain bread-and-butter, without any "relish" at all—an opinion which Mrs. Marlow received with a sniff of contempt.

To say the truth, the girl was bewildered, and had no inclination for eating. The company and surroundings in which she found herself were so strange that she almost doubted her own identity, and added to this was the disagreeable consciousness that the man who had been called "Jim" was staring at her with undisguised and insolent admiration.

She was in many respects a creature of impulse, as our readers will have seen, and the moment she sets eyes on Marlow a curious repugnance towards him had taken possession of her.

And yet he was not by any means repulsive; indeed, some people might have called him handsome—and this opinion was one in

which he himself shared, for every time he happened to rise he would cast a glance at his reflection in the paper-wreather mirror over the mantelpiece, and smirk with all the satisfaction of a vain school-girl when she is trying on some new and becoming bonnet.

Instinct is a strange thing, and instinct warned Irene Duval against James Marlow.

CHAPTER XIX.

IRENE could hardly have told afterwards how that first evening in London passed; but it left a vague sense of unhappiness, scarcely accounted for by the fact of feeling herself in thoroughly uncongenial company.

Luckily for her, she was able to retire early, and Mrs. Henry accompanied her upstairs to the bedroom they were going to share together.

"Before you undress I want to have a few words with you," she said, locking the door, so as to secure herself from interruption; and seating herself on the single chair the room contained, while Irene stood leaning against the bottom of the iron bedstead. "It seems to me, from the way in which you hold yourself aloof from the people downstairs, that you have an idea you are considerably above them in station, but it is an idea that I would advise you to dismiss as soon as possible, for it is a false one. Your birth is no better than Jim Marlow's—not so good, in fact; and it is possible you may be dependent on him for a good deal of help, and so I would change my tone towards him if I were you."

"I was not impolite to your friend, I hope?" returned Irene, with a serene indifference that had the effect of irritating her companion.

"Unpolite; No," she sneered; "you only treated him as if he were too far beneath you to be noticed—that is all; and I tell you plainly that it will be better for you to drop that sort of thing as soon as maybe!"

"Shall we be in this house long, then?" questioned the girl, anxiously.

"No; a few days, perhaps. At least, you will; I shall have to return home as my time is not my own."

"But you will not leave me here alone?" cried Irene, in a sudden wild terror. "Oh! surely you will not be so unkind—so cruel?"

She clasped her slim white hands together, and held them out entreatingly; but Mrs. Henry's cold eyes never softened at the appeal.

"Why should not I leave you here alone?" she demanded harshly. "You will be quite safe, for the Marrows are honest, even if their manners are rough, and no one will attempt to harm you. Besides, it is necessary you should stay, and this brings me to the main point of what I want to say to you. Of course, it is needless to remark that you are penniless; and as I am only a servant myself you will readily understand that I have not much to give you. In point of fact, you will have to earn your own living."

"I wish to, I am more than willing to do so if you will tell me how I shall begin!" interrupted the young girl, eagerly.

"In England the market is already overstocked by governesses and shopgirls," continued Mrs. Henry, taking no heed of the interruption; "and as you would not care for domestic service the only alternative left for you is to go abroad. Now, it so happens that I have some relatives, farmers, in Australia, and I have mentioned you to them. They have several children, and are now in want of someone to teach them,

so I have made arrangements for you to go out there, and become their governess."

Irene was so completely taken aback by the suddenness of this announcement that she was literally at a loss for words in which to reply to it, and after waiting a minute or two, Mrs. Henry went on,—

"James Marlow is captain and part owner of a sailing vessel trading between here and Melbourne, and he has promised to give you a passage out on payment of a very small sum, and as a favour to me. I am naturally grateful to him for the kindness, and I am assured that I can with confidence trust him to take care of you, and see you safely into the hands of my relatives, one of whom will come to Melbourne to meet you, and accompany you to your future home. I think you will be pleased with the place; the climate is very good, and some of the scenery fine. At all events it will be a complete change, and I know how fond girls of your age are of that."

While she was speaking a dozen wild ideas flashed through her listener's brain, and when she had finished, the girl said, bitterly,—

"Considering that I am your niece, it seems to me you are very anxious to get rid of me."

"I have no alternative," was the cold reply. "Even if I wished to keep you in England it would be my duty not to neglect so favourable an opening for you as this promises to be. Remember, I am acting for your best interests."

"I do not believe it!" exclaimed Irene, passionately. "If you cared one scrap for me you would not send me alone into a strange land, amongst strange people, just because a situation as governess happens to be open to me. There are plenty of such situations in England to which I might go if you cared to make an effort; but the fact is, you hate my presence here, and your one idea is to get rid of me!"

Her words, impulsive and excited as they were, hit the mark, and Mrs. Henry's pale face grew still paler.

"You need not contradict me," continued Irene, who mild and gentle as she usually seemed, yet had plenty of spirit; "for I do not base my opinion only on what you have just said, but on your whole course of conduct both during my school-days at the convent, and since my arrival in England. It was you who wished me to take the veil in order to get rid of me; and now that I utterly refuse to become a nun, you have concocted this plan of sending me to Australia, so as to wash your hands of my future. You need not take so much trouble," she added, drawing up her slender, column-like throat with a stately grace all her own, "for I give you my word I will not be a burden to you; and if you will only let me apply to you for a recommendation—strangers will not employ me without it—I will never trouble you further. Neither"—her voice grew very sorrowful—"will I let people know that you are connected with me, so that your anxiety to hide our relationship may be at an end."

Whatever impression her words may have made on Mrs. Henry's mind one thing was certain—namely, that the woman was thoroughly astonished at, and utterly unprepared for, such an exhibition of spirit on the part of the girl whose flexible nature she had thought it it would be an easy task to bend to her own will. She looked at her with something like respect.

"At the same time," added Irene, boldly; "I do not say that I shall not make some endeavour to find out all there is to be known about my parents, and thus solve the mystery that you have done so much to keep up."

A little cry of rage and mortification escaped the baffled woman.

"You had better not!" she hissed, losing her usual caution in the anger at feeling herself defied. "For your own sake, I warn you against it."

Irene laughed contemptuously.

"Your warning will be of no avail. Whatever the consequences may be, I am willing to risk them. Aye, and I shall succeed in my inquiries, you may be sure, for I am certain of finding friends to help me!"

Mrs. Henry rose in evident agitation. If there had been room she would have paced up and down, but as there was not she went to the window and leaned out, so as to gain time to think before committing herself to a reply.

The outlook was not pleasant. A high, dingy wall, above the top of which masts and spars were dimly visible in the gloom; the street was dark—for lamps were few and far between—and quiet, for there were few houses, and those some distance apart.

The young girl waited patiently for her to speak, and it must be confessed that she was rather triumphant at the effect her behaviour had produced—and confirmed in her resolution of persevering in the course of conduct she had, so far, successfully adopted.

Perhaps, in her inmost heart, she was astonished at her own courage, for it must be remembered that she had been brought up under the strictest discipline of obedience, and it is difficult to shake off, all in a minute, the custom of years.

"You are a foolish, headstrong girl," said Mrs. Henry, closing the window, and returning to her seat. "And you must take the consequences of your rashness. You will not be guided by me, therefore you shall learn the truth. Your mother was my elder sister, and your father was notorious all over England for his crimes—a burglar, a forger, a coiner, I do not think there was a single branch of wickedness in which he was not an expert. More than this, when he pretended to marry my sister he had another wife living, so that you have not even a right to the name by which you are called. Now do you understand my desire to keep your existence a secret?"

Poor Irene's face had grown whiter than the thorn bloom upon April hedges, and she shrank back with the movement of one who had just suffered a physical hurt. And, indeed, no blow, however hardly dealt, could have pained her as did those cold, cruel words, which came upon her like a black cloud, behind whose darkness the sun has gone done.

Although she had never known a mother's love, she had had tender dreams of what it might be, and the disillusion was terrible.

At the moment she did not doubt its truth, for it furnished a satisfactory explanation of the manifest desire held by Mrs. Henry to get rid of her, without letting the world become aware there was such a person.

Perhaps Mrs. Henry was touched by the white misery of her face, for she said in a softer voice,—

"I would have spared you this if it had been possible, but your own folly is to blame for the revelation. Why could you not yield yourself to my judgement? If you had done so you might have gone to Australia, and begun a new life among people who would never have known your shame, and there would have been every prospect of happiness for you. But, there, the mischief's done now, so it is no good wasting words over it. Perhaps it may be a lesson to you in the future."

Irene put her hands before her eyes, and

for a few moments did not speak. She was so young, so innocent, so ignorant, even of the world's wickedness, that the agony of her humiliation was almost greater than she could bear.

It seemed to her, that, from all humanity, she had been chosen to bear the most terrible burden of shame, and the sense of it actually bewildered her.

"Of course," added Mrs. Henry, "no one need know of this except our two selves, and if you are wise you will go to Australia to the situation provided for you, and make up your mind never to look upon England again. It is the only plan open to you so far as I can see, and although you have accused me of wishing to get rid of you, I have really been acting for your good all the time. I do not deny that I had no wish people should know of your connection with me, for I am in service, and have always been respected and thought a good deal of. No disgrace has ever blackened my name so far, because when my sister died I took possession of you, and so no one ever knew the truth of the matter. As for your father—well, he died in prison, where he was serving out a sentence of penal servitude."

"Oh, hush—hush!" cried Irene, in piteous entreaty. "Tell me no more; I have heard enough; and I cannot bear it—I cannot bear it!"

"The best thing for you will be to go to bed, and have a good sleep," observed Mrs. Henry, briskly, as if, under present circumstances, such a blessing as sleep could come to the stricken girl. "Let me help you to undress."

Irene suffered her to unfasten her clothes, but did not speak a word, and when she was in bed Mrs. Henry left the room, quietly bolting the door on the outside ere she descended the stairs.

She was not a woman to neglect precautions, and as it was not unlikely that Irene might take it into her head to leave the house, she thought it as well to provide for such a contingency.

At the bottom of the stairs she paused in indecision, and thought for a few moments, her eyes betraying some perplexity.

On re-entering the sitting-room, she found it occupied by James Marlow alone, his mother having gone to the nearest public-house on an errand that may be left to the imagination of the reader.

"That's a pretty girl of yours," observed the man, thus showing in what direction his thoughts had been running.

"Yes—pretty enough."

"What relation did you say she was to you?"

"My niece."

"Ain't much like you," he said, with a grin that was hardly complimentary to the lady addressed.

"No, she features her father, who is dead," returned Mrs. Henry, composedly, and then she drew from her pocket a sheet of paper and a pencil. "I want to send a telegram. Where is the nearest office?"

"You can't send it to-night; it's too late. But I'll take it for you first thing in the morning if you like."

He thanked him, and then wrote her message.

It was addressed to "Mrs. Seymour, Woodleigh Court, W—shire," and it contained these words, *

"Shall not be able to return as soon as I intended. Have had some trouble with my niece, but think things will work smoothly now. Vessel does not sail for two or three days. Don't expect me till afterwards."

"There," she muttered, as she finished, "It is better to be on the safe side."

And perhaps it was for this reason that she did not entrust Mr. James Marlow to

send the telegram, but got up early the next morning and took it herself.

CHAPTER XX.

MARJORIE WYNDHAM was not one of those shilly-shallying people who are blown about by this and that opposing current, and when she had once said a thing, it generally followed that she kept her word, no matter at what cost to herself. Therefore the morning after their interview in the garden, when Geoffrey came to her and said,—

"Your father told me I should find you here, and gave me hopes that you might look more favourably on my suit—"

She interrupted him with a quick wave of the hand.

"If you still wish it I am willing to become your wife," she said, with quiet, if cold, decision.

"I do wish it; it is the one desire of my heart. Oh! how can I express my gratitude to you—"

Again she interrupted him, and this time with a slight contraction of the brows that might have meant either pain or anger.

"You will please me much better by saying nothing at all about it, and perhaps when you have heard what I have to say you may not think the favour I confer upon you a very great one, for I tell you candidly that I feel for you neither love nor liking."

"It will come!" he interpolated, eagerly. "I am willing to wait, because I know it will come."

"I am by no means certain. Indeed, my opinion is in quite another direction. However, the risk is yours, and if you are willing to accept it, there is no more to be said."

"I am quite willing, and you have made me very happy."

He bent down to kiss her hand, and although a quick shiver of repulsion thrilled through Marjorie's veins at the touch of his lips, she suffered the caress in passive silence, and then Geoffrey—wise enough to see he had better not intrude his presence upon her any longer—quietly left the room, a smile of exultation lighting up his features as he reached the hall.

"Everything comes to him who waits," he muttered to himself, "and after our marriage her love will come to me. I am a lucky fellow! Wealth, position, and a beautiful wife! What more can any reasonable man want?"

Meanwhile Marjorie had leaned out on the window-sill of the morning-room, where the fresh, sweet incense of rain-washed mignonette came in puffs to her nostrils, and the Gloire de Dijon roses that grew up the house nodded gently against her cheek, swayed by the soft, south wind.

"I wonder if good can come out of evil?" she murmured, half aloud. "Surely, if I save my father from a miserable poverty, my sacrifice will not have been in vain."

And then she sighed, and thought of life as she had pictured it, glorified by Roy's love. How bright and delightful it had seemed!—how divine a glow had rested on that future which they were to share together!—and how dull, and grey, and sunless it looked now!

Well, other women had suffered besides herself, and there was no reason why she should be exempt from the lot of humanity.

Wise philosophy! But the young heart cannot be satisfied with philosophy, when it yearns for love?

* * * * *

That same night, after all the Wyndham Abbey household had retired, Mr. Geoffrey Wyndham let himself out with a latch-key,

and after sauntering quietly across the lawn with the air of having just come out for a stroll, cast a rapid glance around, in order to assure himself that he was unwatched, and then threw away his cigar, and walked at a pretty quick pace towards the Lodge, at the entrance of the wood.

Arrived before it, he paused, and looked up at the windows. In one of the lower ones a light was burning, and, shining through the crimson blind, it sent a ruddy patch of light on the little garden in front, and helped to guide the visitor up the narrow strip of pathway in the centre.

He knocked gently at the door, accompanying his knock with a peculiar whistle, which seemed to be recognised, for the door was immediately opened by Mrs. Fanning herself.

"Oh! so it is you," she observed, letting him in.

"Of course it is; who else should it be at this time of night?" he rejoined, rather testily, closing the door and relocking it, then seating himself in the single armchair the room contained, while the mistress of the house stood opposite, her arm resting on the low mantelpiece, and her eyes fixed intently on his face.

She was as the Squire had said, a handsome woman, of a somewhat foreign cast of countenance. As a matter of fact she was half Spanish, and resembled her dark-eyed mother much more than her English father.

"Well," she said at length, in Spanish, "has the plan succeeded?"

"The plan? Oh, yes—you mean the letter. By the way, Isabel, that was a very clever idea of yours, and I admire you immensely for it. I wonder Roy Fraser does not transfer his affection from Marjorie Wyndham to yourself."

"Perhaps he will. Who knows?" she rejoined, with a careless shrug of the shoulders. "He is a nice young fellow, and once or twice I have really felt qualms at playing him such a trick. You may laugh, but it is the truth, nevertheless."

"Your qualms come rather late in the day ma belle. When conscience and self-interest are at variance, I observe it is almost always the latter that triumphs. As I explained to you, it was for our mutual good to get him out of the way, for he is an inquisitive young gentleman, and might have given us trouble if it had been to his interest to do so. As luck would have it, the Squire saw him walking down the path with you, and told Miss Marjorie, who did not take the news in good part by any means. You possess a great gift in your mesmeric powers."

"Yes, but it was with the greatest difficulty I contrived to get him to let me put him under their influence."

"How did you manage it? I have not heard any of the particulars as yet."

"Well, I saw Mr. Fraser passing the cottage, and called him in. At first he was unwilling to enter, but he is too courteous to like refusing a lady's request, so at last he came in; and then after a little conversation, I told him, in a casual sort of a way, that I had seen Miss Wyndham drive by that morning, and one of the gamekeepers had told me she was on her way to Woodleigh Court, where she was going to spend the day with Miss Seymour."

"I could tell from his look of disappointment that he had been counting on seeing her, and after that he seemed in no hurry to leave, for, of course, he thought he had no chance of his getting a word with Miss Marjorie. He asked me a dozen questions about her—whether I had seen her, how she looked, and if you were still at the Abbey? and I answered them quite candidly, and asked him to stay to lunch."

"He refused at first, but I pressed him hard, saying I wished to ask his advice on my own affairs, and pleaded that I was a stranger in a strange land, and at last he yielded. Then I led the conversation round to mesmerism, and he said he did not believe in it, so I asked him to let me try my powers on him; and as I had surmised, he proved a very good subject, and sank into a magnetic trance almost immediately. It was while he was in this trance that I dictated the letters which he wrote."

"And when he awoke, did he know anything about what had happened?" inquired Geoffrey, who had followed the recital with every appearance of interest.

"Nothing whatever. He was rather confused, so I led him out into the fresh air, and put my hand on his arm to steady him. It was then that the Squire passed."

"And thought from your attitude that you must be lovers!" chuckled Geoffrey. "A splendid joke, was it not? After that, I suppose the young man returned to town?"

"Yes! He said he had some business letters to write for the night's post, and of course, after what I had told him, he fancied there was no chance of seeing his lady-love. Still," added Mrs. Fanning, with some remorse, "I did not like the job, for he had been kind to me, and it was an ill return to make."

"Pshaw! my dear Isabel, you are growing much too conscientious. The matter stands thus. I have acquired an influence over the Squire, who has been advised by the lawyers not to resist my claim, and who will do a good deal for the sake of retaining peaceful possession of the Abbey during his lifetime. Marjorie, on the contrary, would fight the matter out to the bitter end, and, if, by any chance, it should come into the Law Courts, it is just possible, that perfect as my proofs seem there might be discovered a flaw in them, and that flaw would not only deprive me of the Abbey and its lands, but would place my liberty in jeopardy for the next twenty years. Do you understand?"

She nodded, with an expression of intelligence in the great dark wells of her eyes.

"Marjorie is only a girl, and cannot, therefore, act on her own responsibility," he continued, still watching her intently, as if it were of some importance to discover her mental attitude while he spoke. "Besides, she is devoted to her father, and would do nothing in opposition to his wishes. But we all know how quickly a girl changes under the influence of love, and you may be sure Mr. Roy Fraser would not have let her inheritance go from her without a struggle. He might even have persuaded her into a secret marriage, and that would have been a great blow to my plans"—how great an one his listener did not guess—"for if he had once acquired the right of interference he would immediately have set himself a task of investigation, which might have been very disastrous so far as I was concerned. Therefore our little plan was absolutely necessary, and really Fate seems to have aided us."

"But did Mr. Fraser never write to the girl?"

"He did, my sweet Isabel; but the girl never got the letters."

"You stopped them?"

"I did," he returned, with an evil smile, "and I am sure you will admire my industry and perseverance, for I always contrived to look over the contents of the post bag, both before it went out and before it came in: and when there chanced to be a letter for Marjorie in a gentleman's handwriting, and with a London postmark on the envelope, I took the liberty of abstracting it. The

matter was rather difficult at first, but practice makes perfect, and eventually I found it the easiest thing in the world."

" You are a villain, Jim ! " she said, and he bowed, as if in acknowledgment of a compliment.

" So that I am a clever one what does it matter ? " he demanded, with supreme indifference.

" You are a villain ! " she repeated, deliberately, " and I sometimes think that if you treat other people so infamously, what guarantee have I that you will not treat me the same ? "

" Have I not given you my love, Isabel ? " he asked, moving, however, rather uneasily under her searching gaze.

" Your love ! What is it worth ? "

" It is hardly for me to say," he returned, with an affectation of humility ; " but so far it has been true."

" Has it ? " she retorted, dryly. " I am sometimes more than inclined to doubt it. Still, I think you are too cautious to dream of playing me false. I am not the sort of woman to be trifled with, as you are quite well aware, and if you did try to throw me over—"

She paused expressively, and he leaned forward with some eagerness.

" Well," he said, " suppose I did try to throw you over—what then ? "

" I should kill you ! " she hissed, between her set teeth, and her whole face became instinct with an almost fiendish determination. " Do you see this ? " She drew from her breast a small and finely-chased revolver. " It was my mother's; it has upon it her initials, 'R. F.'—Rosina Fanning—and she gave it me on her dying bed. ' It is the best protection a woman can have,' she said to me while the death-dews lay on her forehead, and I have religiously preserved it ever since."

" Don't talk in that melodramatic fashion, Isabel ! " he exclaimed, with a forced laugh, although his face had grown of a sickly yellow colour. " It would be a stupid sort of revenge to kill me, when you would be pretty sure to be hanged for the crime."

" And do you think I should care one iota for that ? " she said, with passionate scorn. " I assure you the fear of being hanged, even if it were a certainty, would not stay my hand from revenge. But why have you asked me this question ? "

" Simply out of curiosity—nothing else. You are surely not growing suspicious of me ? "

" I don't know," she returned, with a vague uneasiness. Sometimes doubts will come, whether one wishes it or not, and your manner changes occasionally."

" Never to you," he said, getting up and kissing her on the cheek. " Have I not often told you you are the most beautiful woman I ever met ? "

" So often that I have grown to doubt whether you mean it," she answered, a sneer curling her finely-cut upper lip; then, with a change of tone, she added. " I tell you, Jim, I have borne this kind of life quite long enough. I am sick to death of it, and I will bear it no longer ! Why should I consent to be mewed up in this horrid little place, away from my friends—away from the sunlight—away from you ? My proper place is by your side, and it is time I assumed it ! "

" Was it by my wish that you came here ? " he demanded, sullenly.

" No, to do you justice, it was not," she replied, with a short laugh. " For when you quitted Australia you took every pains to leave no clue to your destination ! "

" I should have sent for you, when matters had arranged themselves."

" Should you ? I very much doubt it; but that is not the point at present. I

showed you I was not to be shaken off so easily, and though there were many difficulties in the way I managed to track you to London, and then down here ! "

" And once here, there was no getting rid of you," he muttered, below his breath, and he half-turned round, so that she should not see the expression of baffled malignity, that came in his eyes at the remembrance.

He was recalling the day when he met her in the wood, and she had candidly told him she had come to Wyndhamstowe for the purpose of watching him, and finding out what he was doing.

So taken by surprise had he been, that he had told her a good deal of the truth, and then implored her to help him, declaring that when his position was secure, he would present her to the world as his wife.

" And you will promise to go through another matrimonial service with me ? " she had said. " I am quite aware that the ceremony performed in Australia was not legal, and I shall not be satisfied until we are married in an English church by an English clergyman."

Of course, he had promised. He would have promised anything, rather than arouse her anger, which might have proved fatal to his hopes for the future; and then it had struck him that he might make use of her woman's wit, which had helped him in the past, and which could help him now.

We have seen the result, and its effect on Marjorie, which had proved exactly what Geoffrey's foresight had predicted.

But when we make use of edged tools, the greatest possible caution is necessary, lest they should happen to cut the fingers that handle them, and this was what Geoffrey feared in the present instance.

He knew his companion of old—knew that she was utterly reckless of consequences when passion took possession of her, and knew as well that if she once suspected his relations with Marjorie, her wrath would be like the rushing waters of a mountain torrent, which sweeps everything before it in its headlong career.

And yet nothing was more likely than that she would hear of their engagement, for when once it became known it would spread like wildfire in the quiet little village, where gossip was welcomed in whatever shape it came. It therefore behoved him to prepare her mind; but although, physically, he was no coward, he trembled and hesitated at the task before him, and would fain have deferred it had deferment been possible.

" How frightened you looked the day you first met me, when you were coming out of the wood ! " observed Mrs. Fanning—as she called herself; " and it was not the sight of me that scared you either, for before you set eyes on my face you looked as white as a ghost ! "

" I was scared," confessed Geoffrey, " and when I found out you were in the neighbourhood, I fancied I had you to thank for the scare. Are you quite sure—quite, quite sure that it was not you who spoke the old name by which I used to be known, while I was standing near the copper beech-tree ? "

She shook her head in very positive negation.

" No ; I told you before, when you asked me, that I had not been farther in the wood. I don't know why you should doubt me," she added, cynically, " seeing that I should gain nothing by telling you a lie ! "

" That is true," he said, smiling grimly; but the smile-departed almost immediately, and was replaced by an expression of anxiety. " There is something mysterious about the episode all the same, for I am

ready to swear I heard the name repeated three times, and there is certainly no one about here who ever knew me by it ! "

" It was fancy. Your nerves are upset, and so you fancied you heard it."

" It was no fancy. Of that I am assured. However, it is useless dwelling on the matter, as there is no prospect of its being cleared up; and, besides, I want to talk to you on rather an important subject. Fortune has, so far, favoured me; but, at the same time, I know I am embarking on a perilous enterprise, which will require all my skill to bring to a successful issue. Failure, as you know, means ruin."

" I suppose this is the preface to asking for my help in some way," she observed, astirringly.

" You are right, as usual. In fact, it rests with you as to whether I shall conquer Fortune or not. I do not conceal that I want you to make a sacrifice; but, Isabel, and his arm stole round her waist, and his lips pressed her cheek, " you have hitherto proved yourself so devoted to my interests, and so willing to aid me, that you could hardly fail me now, and I have every confidence in your love ! "

" I don't like the beginning, Jim Stone," she said, abruptly, and drawing herself away as she spoke. " It sounds false—it has the ring of having been made up some time ago, and thought over before you committed it to words ! "

" Don't render my task harder than its own nature makes it," he exclaimed, imploringly; and it was clear that he was considerably taken aback by her penetration. " Heaven knows I regret, to the bottom of my heart, that I should have to utter such a proposal to you, but there is no getting over necessity. Listen," and he lowered his voice, that even the walls might not overhear his communication.

" You know that there is a flaw in my claim to the Wyndham estates, and if that flaw were discovered there would be an end to the claim. Now, although it is improbable, it is not impossible that someone should turn up who may play the deuce with my proofs, and in that case I should have to fly, without a sou in my pocket, and we should be worse off than before. There is one way by which all risk of these unpleasant consequences may be averted, and wealth positively secured."

" What way is that ? "

" I hardly like to tell you," he said, hesitatingly, " for though I should be able to give you as much money as you liked to spend, I should not be able to acknowledge you as my wife. In fact, it would necessitate my making another woman my wife."

" What ? "

He took her hands, and held them firmly in his own—so firmly, that all her efforts were powerless to draw them away.

" Now be reasonable, Isabel. What I am suggesting is for your sake, as well as my own, and, in reality, it will fall harder on me than on you. I shall make a most liberal settlement on you, and see you constantly; but, in order to assure my position, I must marry Marjorie Wyndham ! "

CHAPTER XXI.

LORD DUNMORE, mindful of his promise to Mrs. Seymour, lost no time in having the promised " talk " with his son, and during the conversation, strongly impressed upon him the necessity of at once making an offer to Ermentrude.

The young man listened in silence, and when his father had finished speaking, said,—

" I suppose I have no alternative but to propose to her ? "

" Certainly not," returned the Earl, in some surprise; " in fact, I made quite sure

you had already done so until Mrs. Seymour undid me, and I must confess that your conduct has been blameworthy in putting it off so long."

It was in the library that this conversation took place, and St. Croix went to the window, and began drumming restlessly with his fingers on the panes.

Lord Dunmore followed him.

"What is the matter, St. Croix? Is the prospect of this marriage distasteful to you?"

"Most distasteful."

"Then why did you not say so before matters had gone too far for you to withdraw honourably?"

"Because I did not know myself."

"Since when have you known?"

"Only within the last few days," responded the young man, in a low voice, while his cheek flushed beneath its tan.

"Does that mean you have bestowed your affections elsewhere?"

"It does."

The Earl was silent for a few minutes, and evidently deeply agitated by the communication.

"I am very sorry, Harold! very—very sorry, my boy!" he said, at length, calling his son by his Christian name, a thing that very rarely happened. "It will fall hardly on you, but I do not see that it can possibly make any difference as regards Ermentrude, whom you have compromised by your attentions."

"Then," said St. Croix, but although he put the question he knew beforehand what the answer must be, "you think I am bound to marry her?"

"I am afraid there is no alternative."

The Earl did not ask who was the object of his affections, or where he had met her. He had a keen and most delicate sense of honour, and would have looked upon such questions as an exhibition of vulgar curiosity, unworthy of a gentleman.

St. Croix, on the other hand, refrained from telling him, because he was aware it would of necessity have been a shock for his father to know that he had given his heart to the niece of Mrs. Seymour's maid!

"There is no more to be said," he observed after a pause. "I will see Miss Seymour at once, and put an end to the matter."

And with that, he went out to the library, and crossed the hall to the morning-room, where he knew Ermentrude was alone, writing letters.

When he entered, she had apparently finished her correspondence, for she was leaning back in her chair, with her hands clasped idly on her lap, and St. Croix was absolutely startled at the expression of her face.

She looked positively despairing; her cheeks were white, her eyes lustreless, and her lips set together in a thin tense line. Totally unlike her usual brilliant self, it was as if a mask had been suddenly dropped from her features, revealing the struggling passion-torn woman beneath.

But she was a perfect actress, and even while St. Croix stood at the door, hesitating whether to retreat or advance, she started up and called a smile to her lips. The colour came back to her cheeks, the brightness to her eyes, and she was once more the Ermentrude of society.

The change was so rapid as to be little less than marvellous, and the Viscount almost doubted if his first impression had not been a mistake, and he himself the victim of a delusion.

"Are you going to write letters?" she asks gaily. "If so, the writing-table is quite at your service, for I have finished mine."

"No, I came for the purpose of speaking to you."

"Indeed! That sounds ominous. I hope you have nothing disagreeable to say?"

"I hope not either; that is, I trust you will not find it 'disagreeable,'" said St. Croix, taking a seat by her side, and feeling more thoroughly wretched than he had ever felt in his life before. "I do not think there is any necessity to beat about the bush, Ermentrude, for you must be aware of the object that brought me to Woodleigh Court, and I may as well come to the point at once. Will you be my wife?"

It was an abrupt sort of wooing, but if his life had depended on it, Harold could not have perfumed his lips with love vows which were false; and, as it happened, she greatly preferred this style of courtship.

She did not answer immediately, but bent her head, and played abstractedly with a flower in her belt, a scarlet pomegranate blossom, which she pulled to pieces petal by petal.

Once she looked up suddenly and clasped her hands, and seemed on the point of confiding some secret to his keeping, but as suddenly changed her mind, and resumed her former position.

"Well, Ermentrude," said St. Croix, presently, but there was no passion in his voice, only a feverish unrest, "what answer have you to give me? Will you accept me as your husband?"

"Yes," she replied, "on one condition; namely, that you do not press for a speedy marriage."

"What do you mean? It would probably be as well that we should be married in six or seven months."

"No, no! That is much too soon. A year will be quite early enough."

"As you like," he returned, rather surprised at this somewhat strange proviso. "I do not wish to press you against your inclinations." He paused, and then drew a case from his pocket, out of which he took a circlet of diamonds—magnificent gems—which flashed back the sunlight in a thousand rays of starry points. "You must let me place this ring on your finger. It has been the betrothal ring of my family for centuries, but I do not think it ever rested on a fairer finger than the one it graces now."

Perhaps the compliment was intended to cover his own lack of warmth, and, if so, it succeeded perfectly, for Ermentrude's vanity was always her strongest point, and a pleased smile played round her lips, as she held her finger to the light and watched the brilliancy of the gems, with their glittering, prismatic radiance.

Maybe her ideas went even farther, and she saw in imagination the caskets containing the far-famed Dunmore diamonds, and speculated on the sensation she should make when she appeared at Court wearing them.

The papers would be full of her praises; the clubs would re-echo with the murmurs of admiration her beauty would provoke; she would be the theme of the hour, and the shop-windows would be full of her photographs!

Not a very pleasing prospect for most women, but to this one it represented a perfect Paradise of delight, dashed, however, by a cold fear lest she might never enjoy it.

St. Croix imprinted a cold kiss on her forehead, and thus the betrothal was sealed.

Afterwards, he went to inform Sir Tracie of what had happened, and was heartily congratulated by the Baronet.

"I am delighted to think that you will, in a sense, become a relation," Sir

Tracie said, as he shook hands with him.

"Your father and I have always been dear friends, and I look upon you almost as a son. If," he continued, with a sigh, "Heaven had blessed me with a son I should have liked him to resemble you. Of course, it is an understood thing that Ermentrude is my heiress, so you will in time become master of my estates, and those, added to your father's, will make you one of the richest men in England."

St. Croix expressed no elation at the prospect, neither did he feel any. It seemed to him that a cottage, however humble, would have given him a happier destiny if Irene could have shared it with him.

"The news you have just given me has determined me to make my will without delay," pursued the Baronet. "It is a duty I have put off from day to day, and week to week, but it is one that I have really no right to postpone, for the sake of Ermentrude, so I will go to Blackminster this very afternoon, and give the instructions to my lawyer to prepare the draft immediately."

At that moment, Mrs. Seymour came in, and her appearance saved St. Croix the embarrassment of a reply.

"Alicia!" said Lord Tracie, with an unaccustomed gaiety in his voice, "I have just received from St. Croix a very joyous communication. He and Ermentrude are betrothed!"

A quick flash of joy came over the face of Mrs. Seymour, and she exclaimed, impulsively,

"Is this true? Oh! I am so glad—so glad!"

"And I, in recognition of the event, intend going to my lawyers to-day, and giving instructions for my will to be prepared," added Sir Tracie.

Greatly to his surprise, his sister-in-law burst into flood of tears. As a rule, she was an extremely self-possessed woman, who very rarely gave vent to her emotions.

The fact was, however, that her nerves had lately been strained to their utmost tension, and the relief given her by these two pieces of news was so great as, for a few minutes, to actually overwhelm her.

"Forgive me!" she said, recovering her composure. "I ought to be—and am—deeply ashamed of myself for this outburst, but the assurance of Ermentrude's good fortune, and the certainty of her future happiness being secured, overcame me. I will reserve my felicitations for another occasion, Harold; and also," turning to the Baronet, "my thanks to you."

"I did not know her feelings were so deep," observed Sir Tracie, as she disappeared. "However, I think all the better of her for such a display of weakness. She is a strange woman, and though I have known her so many years I cannot say that I entirely understand her even yet."

True to his promise, he rode over to Blackminster after luncheon, Ermentrude and her betrothed watching his departure from the open French windows of the morning-room.

"What a pretty horse!" observed St. Croix, looking after the glossy, well-groomed chestnut on which the Baronet was mounted. "Has Sir Tracie had him long?"

"No; a month or so, I believe. He bought this one and another at the same time, and they are so exactly alike that even the groom could not tell the difference if it were not that this one has a white star on its forehead, which the other has not. They are called Castor and Pollux."

"Very good names for them," returned St. Croix.

"Yes, and they would be a most valuable pair, but that Pollux is so frightfully vicious that no one cares to risk riding him."

Sir Travice won't sell him, but he is practically useless, for he never leaves the stable except when he is taken out for exercise, and then he is led by a groom. By the way," added Ermentrude, carelessly, "would you like to ride over to Wyndham Abbey this afternoon?"

Harold assented, and went to order the horses. He had, that day, made a discovery with regard to the man he had seen at Wyndham Abbey when he called on Marjorie, and it amounted to nothing more or less than the certainty that the said Mr. Geoffrey Wyndham was the self same person, from whose rudeness he had protected Irene, on the occasion of their first meeting on the Embankment.

CHAPTER XXII.

When Irene woke up in the morning after her conversation with Mrs. Sumner it was with a vague sense of pain, which became intensified when she remembered the substance of the communication made to her the night before.

Her head ached, and her pulses throbbed; but the physical suffering she could have borne much more easily than the sick pain at her heart, born of the knowledge of her shameful antecedents.

Her very innocence made the burden heavier, for to her there was no degree in sin. Sin itself was a hideous monster, which nothing could palliate, dimly known, but loathsome even in its obscurity.

Once, thinking over all Mrs. Sumner had said, she was inclined to think with her that the best thing she could do would be to go to Australia, and there escape the odium that in England must rest upon her because of her birth; but an instinct stronger than reason made her shrink from trusting herself in an entirely unknown land, and perhaps—though she did not confess it—the fear that if she went to the Antipodes she would never again set eyes on St. Croix, helped to make her repugnance to leaving England more intense.

Mrs. Sumner was already up and dressed, so Irene made haste to get her toilette completed, and then descended to the parlour, from whence came the sound of frizzling bacon, an operation that was being performed by Mrs. Marlow, although, as she, with much dignity, hastened to explain, she kept "a girl" to do the dirty work.

Frying bacon not being included in the dirty work, the girl was not supposed to be worthy of its performance; and, indeed, when Irene saw her, she was not surprised that she was debarred from the honour of cooking, for her hands looked as if they had not been washed for a month, and her face matched them.

Still, in spite of this, in spite of her rags and her filthy apron, and her slouching gait, there was an expression of half-pathetic humility on her features that touched the young girl, and made her smile kindly at the despised and hard-worked "slavey," who rejoiced in the name of "Euphemia."

The day passed without incident. Mr. Marlow left the house in the morning, and did not return till night, and his mother spent her time chiefly in the kitchen, so that her visitors were left alone.

Mrs. Sumner, however, did not return to the attack. She was a wise woman, and knew that too much persuasion might prove a great deal more injurious than too little, so she let her words have time to work.

"Could we not go out somewhere?" Irene said, on the third day. "I am getting to long for a mouthful of fresh air."

"Fresh air is a luxury Londoners do without," answered Mrs. Sumner, grimly, "and we should have to go too far to get

away from the houses. No; on consideration, you had better stay indoors."

Irene said no more, for she knew that further entreaties would be useless, and so the day dragged its weary length along, and when night came she retired to her room, pale and weary, and miserable.

Mrs. Sumner followed her after a little while.

"Well," she said, "have you made up your mind about the voyage? Marlow's vessel starts the day after to-morrow, and he has already prepared you a comfortable berth and cabin."

"I am not going," the girl, replied, calmly. "I will get a situation in England, and promise never to trouble you again; but I will not go across the seas."

Then followed a repetition of all the arguments Mrs. Sumner had before made use of to endeavour to make her change her resolution, but all to no avail; for Irene remained firm, and at last Mrs. Sumner desisted from sheer weariness, and the conviction that nothing she could say would prove of any avail.

"Ungrateful girl!" she exclaimed as she left the room. "Disobedience is the return you make me for all the money I have spent on your education at the convent ever since you were two years old."

Irene made no reply, and her aunt's face wore a very uninviting expression as she joined the Marrows downstairs.

"What, has the young lady been troublesome again?" asked James Marlow, to whom Mrs. Sumner had, of course, confided her wish that Irene should have a passage in his vessel across the Pacific. "Does she still refuse to come out in the Anna Maria?"

"Yes, and is not likely to change her mind, returned the woman, moodily.

Marlow uttered an oath which need not be recorded.

"I'm blessed if I would be defied by a chit of a thing like that!" he exclaimed. "If she won't come by fair means, I should try the other way—that's what I should do."

Mrs. Sumner was silent for some time, then she suddenly asked,—

"Is the Anna Maria bound to sail to-morrow?"

"She is, at twelve of the clock, precise. The tide will suit then, and fifty pounds wouldn't make me miss it."

"Twelve o'clock," she repeated, musingly. "Is there a moon?"

"No, the moon don't rise until four o'clock."

"Then it will be quite dark?"

"Dark as pitch."

She nodded as if pleased.

"Why do you ask?" said the seaman, helping himself to some whisky. "What's your little game?"

"I was thinking that we might contrive to get the girl on board without its being noticed. Do you think it possible?"

"Quite possible provided she don't holler."

"I shall take care of that," observed Mrs. Sumner, significantly, and with an evil smile.

"Drugs?"

She nodded without replying, and the man looked meditatively at his toddy.

"It's a risky game if it's found out," he remarked.

"But it won't be found out! How long shall you be getting out into the channel?"

"That depends."

"You will be towed out by a steam tug, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Well, it seems to me that it won't be difficult to keep Irene quiet by means of opiates until after the tug has left you, and it will not matter what she says afterwards,

for you won't stop again until you get to Melbourne."

"Look here," said the man, presently. "I'm quite willing to make an honest penny by taking the girl over the sea; but the action of opiates is uncertain, and I'm not going to put my neck in danger, by administering them, so if they are to be given her, you'll have to do it yourself."

"Very well," Mrs. Sumner returned, after a slight pause; "then I will come on the Anna Maria until she is in the Channel, and then the tug can take me off. Now, about the other arrangements."

They drew a little nearer to each other, and began to speak confidentially—Mrs. Marlow having by this time left the room—and before they parted a bank-note for a considerable amount had passed from Mrs. Sumner's possession into that of the sailor.

"And remember," she said, "more will follow when you have once landed in Australia, and taken the girl up country."

"All right, missus. Seems to me you are uncommon anxious to get rid of the young lady."

"That is my business," she responded, coldly, and with a slight contraction of the brows.

"Certainly, certainly! and so long as I get my money it is nothing to do with me. You needn't be afraid that I shall interfere. I know better than to poke my nose where it isn't wanted, and to keep a quiet tongue in my head so long as I am paid for doing it."

And with this the pair of worthies separated for the night.

The following day passed in the same fashion as its predecessors, except that Mrs. Sumner went out in the morning for half-an-hour, and during her absence Mrs. Marlow remained in the room with Irene, keeping—as the young girl suspected—a watch upon her movements.

Indeed, there could be no doubt that she was virtually a prisoner, for the slightest inclination on her part to go outside the door was met with a sharp command from Mrs. Sumner to stay where she was, and she knew that resistance on her part would be more than useless.

As was natural under the circumstances, she felt miserable and ill at ease, and a strange presentiment of some coming calamity lay upon her like a spell, which she was powerless to shake off.

Perhaps the secret of this might have been found in the mistrust with which she regarded Mrs. Sumner, and the instinctive belief that she was cruel and unscrupulous in the means she took to compass her ends.

At about nine o'clock James Marlow came in from the docks, and was met in the tiny passage by Mrs. Sumner.

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"Is everything all right?" she asked, her voice betraying her anxiety.

"Yes, so far as I can tell, and in all probability, when we get to Dover, we shall have a fair wind, so that the tug will be able to leave us. Have you got the luggage ready?"

"Not yet. I was afraid to fasten up the box lest she might suspect something, but it will not take me five minutes to do that after she has drank the coffee."

He nodded intelligently, and soon afterwards Mrs. Sumner reappeared in the parlour, with a tray, on which were placed cups and saucers and a coffee-pot.

"As you're going away to night I thought I would make you cup of coffee," she said pleasantly to the sailor. "Will you have one, too, Irene?"

The girl answered in the affirmative, being, as a matter of fact, very glad of this offer, for the day had been warm and stuffy, and she had grown thirsty since her mid-day meal.

Mrs. Sumner poured her out a cup, and handed it to her.

"What is the matter?" she asked, presently. "Don't you like it?"

"It—it tastes rather bitter," replied the young girl, with some hesitation.

"Bitter! Nonsense! It's all your fancy. The coffee tastes all right, doesn't it, James?"

"Quite right—it's very good."

"Perhaps there may be rather too much chicory in it," admitted Mrs. Sumner, tasting the liquid in her own cup, "and that would account for its being a little bitter, but it's nothing to hurt. You are too particular, Irene."

Irene, who was extremely anxious of not deserving the implied censure, hastily drank up her coffee, but soon afterwards rose, and moved hastily to the door.

"What is it? Don't you feel well?" asked Mrs. Sumner, rising too.

"Not quite—a little giddy—nothing to hurt," was the incoherent response. "I will go upstairs and lie on the bed, and I daresay I shall be all right directly. Pray don't trouble to come with me."

"It's all right," observed the sailor, after the young girl had left the room. "In ten or fifteen minutes time she ought to be firm asleep, and then you can pack up, and we'll take the traps down to the vessel, and get them safely stowed away before you and my lady come aboard."

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 1989. Back Nos. can be obtained through any newsagent.

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whose brilliant romances have so often charmed and delighted our readers. It will commence in No. 1994, on sale everywhere. TUESDAY, JULY 9th.

Full particulars in our next issue.

Gleanings

It isn't religion that the world lacks, it is charity.

GAMBLERS and drunkards have been known to reform, but never a liar.

ALL those men who have acquired a fortune and kept it, owe more to economy than to shrewdness.

EVERY person is responsible for all the good within the scope of his abilities, and for no more, and none can tell whose sphere is the largest.

A CINCINNATI minister recently surprised his hearers by audibly praying for those of his congregation who were too proud to kneel and too lazy to stand.

A PHYSICIAN in Germany has discovered a method of obliterating wrinkles in the human face. He injects paraffin under the skin, and there it remains, puffing out the wrinkles.

A GEORGIA jury proved itself equal to an emergency in a case where the evidence against the prisoner was quite damaging, but not entirely convincing. It brought in this verdict: "We, the jury, find the prisoner almost guilty."

A LAW recently enacted by the Florida Legislature makes insanity on the part of husband or wife, for four successive years, legal cause for divorce. The person who gets the divorce must provide for the maintenance of the divorced one.

A FRENCH scientist, after numerous experiments, has succeeded in colouring the plumage of birds by the administration of food mixed with aniline dyes. In this way he has, it is stated, produced red-and-blue pigeons, and has imparted to canaries all the colours of the rainbow.

MARRIAGE has proved a sad failure to George W. Anderson, who, after marrying seventeen wives, and deserting them all, now finds himself, at the age of sixty-eight, in workhouse. His last bride he won and married after a courtship of two days. She was a rather giddy maiden of twenty-four.

PAPER coffins are the latest novelty. They are the invention of a Brooklyn physician, who declares they can be made to resemble mahogany, rosewood, or oak, and in any desirable shape. They are said to be water-proof and acid-proof, and can be furnished at one-half the cost of even pine coffins.

A BRITISH physician asserts that the people who live longest are those who make breakfast the chief meal of the day. In the morning the stomach possesses more vigor than at any other time. Nowadays the people who are most subject to ill are those who gorge themselves at night, and tumble into bed soon after a hearty meal.

A BALD Hungarian was induced to try a couple of bottles of hair restorative recommended by his barber. After finishing his second bottle he informed the barber that it was useless. The barber persuaded him to try a third bottle. "It's awful nasty stuff," said the bald man; "but, to please you, I'll drink another bottle. Remember, though, unless my hair sprouts, this will be the last."

A HUMAN needle-cushion dwells in St. Germain, near Paris. She is Mlle. Landrieux, aged sixteen. When she was eleven years old she delighted in swallowing needles. In one day she swallowed forty-nine. Recently they began to work their way to the surface of her hands, arms, legs, feet, and various parts of her body, one even appearing in her eyelid. A physician has already extracted 120 of them.

An inexperienced young man was given a position in a drug store, and was instructed how to effect sales. For instance, he was told that if a patron asked for something not in stock, he was to say, "We are just out, but have something quite as good." A few days later a customer asked for a postage stamp. "Oh," said the clerk, "we are just out of them, but have something fully as good."

ONCE in awhile a useful hint for the housekeeper comes from the man of the family. The man who smokes a meerschaum pipe was observed putting a slice of apple into his box of tobacco to keep it from becoming too dry. Even potato, he said, would do. That led to the discovery of an old idea. Cake or bread may be kept moist and delicious for a comparatively long time by putting a piece of raw apple or potato into the box in which it is kept.

QUEER advertisements occasionally find their way into the Irish papers. A recent issue of a Limerick newspaper announces that "Michael Ryan begs to inform the public that he has a large stock of cars, waggonettes, brakes, hearses, and other pleasure vehicles for sale or hire." This is the same paper which, in a glowing description of a funeral, declared that "Mrs. R. of G——, sent a magnificent wreath of artificial flowers in the form of a cross."

A simple test of drinking water is the Heisch sewage test. Fill a clean pint bottle three-quarters full of the water to be tested, and dissolve in it half a teaspoonful of pure granulated sugar. Cork it and set it in a warm place for two days. If during this time it becomes cloudy or milky it is unfit for domestic use. If it remains perfectly clear it is probably safe. Be careful that the bottle is absolutely as clean as you can make it and the sugar pure.

HIS ONLY CHANCE.—A short time ago, at the ranges at Gravesend, a recruit was being exercised in firing, but not with very promising results. After repeatedly failing to hit the target at 300 yards, the instructor tried him at 200, with the same result. He then decided to try him at 100 yards, but the results were even worse than before. Losing all patience, the instructor exclaimed in disgust, "Fix your bayonet, man, and go and stab the blooming thing; it's your only chance."

A PRETTY custom dating from the wedding of the late Queen Victoria, has ever since pertained in the Royal Family. A sprig of the myrtle which formed part of the bride's wreath was carefully cultured, and in due time planted out. When the Princess Royal was married, sprigs were cut for her bridal wreath from this myrtle tree. The Princess, following her mother's example, had one of the sprigs cared for till it became a full-sized tree, which served for her daughter-in-law's wreath at the wedding of the present Emperor of Germany.

The founder of the kindergarten system of schools was Friedrich Froebel. In 1837 he established the first school of this kind, at Blankenburg, Thuringia, and soon it became the model for similar institutions throughout Germany for the education of children. The object of the kindergarten, as expressed by the founder, is "to give the pupils employment suited to their nature, strengthen their bodies, exercise their senses, employ the waking mind, make them acquainted judiciously with nature and society, and cultivate especially the heart and temper." Many persons denounced Froebel's system, because of the great freedom he allowed the children, and asserted that his schools were nurseries of socialism and atheism. Froebel was born at Oberweissbach in 1782, and died in Marienthal in 1852.

THE largest kitchen in England is that of Babyn Castle, the seat of the Duke of Cleveland. It is thirty feet square, having three chimneys, one for the grate, a second for the stoves, and the third for the great cauldron. The roof is arched, with a small capola in the centre. It has five windows, from each of which steps descend, but only in one instance to the floor, and the gallery runs round the whole interior of the building. The ancient oven has a diameter of fifteen feet, and would allow a tall man to stand upright in it. Vast as this kitchen is, it must have been sometimes taxed by the hospitality of former ages, for in one of the apartments of the castle seven hundred knights were upon one occasion entertained at the same time. And the knights of that day were men of brawn and sinew, who would think lightly of demolishing—each man of them—five pounds of beef, half a sucking pig, a venison pasty or two, washed down with huge flagons of brown October.

LUCKY WINDFALLS.—At a sale at Hartlepool last November a widow bought for a few shillings an old picture in a dirty, unsightly frame. Having taken her purchase home she proceeded to clean it, when to her surprise she discovered stowed away between the canvas and the frame seventeen £5 notes. This coming to the ears of the original vendor he sued her in the County Court, but lost his case. Not long since, at a sale held at Llandrug, near Carnarvon, an oak dresser was bought by a dealer for 30s. Upon examining his bargain he noticed upon the top shelf a mustard tin, which, on being opened, was found to be full of sovereigns and half-sovereigns. A dealer living in the Hampstead Road picked up at a sale a cheap bicycle. This in due course he overhauled, to find concealed in the handle-bars nine half-sovereigns. Last October Madame Jeanne Jacques, a Paris hawker, being annoyed by a mouse that had taken refuge in the chimney, attempted to dislodge the little animal. In so doing she displaced some bricks, and laid bare a cavity that contained securities to the value of £1,600.

WHAT TO READ IN FINGER NAILS.

LONG nails never indicate such great physical strength as short, broad ones. Very long finger-nailed persons are apt to have delicate chests and lungs.

LONG nails, very wide at the top and bluish in appearance, denote bad circulation. Long-nailed men are less critical and more impressionable than those with short nails.

LONG nails indicate ideality and an artistic temperament.

SHORT-NAILED persons are apt to be very visionary and hate to face disagreeable facts.

SHORT-NAILED men never give up an argument.

A KEEN sense of humour accompanies short nails.

SHORT-NAILED persons make good critics; they are sharper and more logical than long-nailed people, and usually more positive in assertion.

SHORT nails, thin and flat at the base, indicate a weak action of the heart.

SHORT nails, very flat and sunken, as it were, into the flesh at the base, are a sign of diseased nerves.

SHORT nails, very flat and inclined to curve out or lift up at the edges, are the fore-runners of paralysis.

DON'T scoff at the idea that pressing the ends of the fingers gently will make them assume the shape of nails, for it is a fact.

Don't use nail bleaches too generously, and don't fail to be stingy of rouge and powder. Let your nails be beautiful with no visible signs of the manieuring that keeps them pink and lovely.

Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

Complaints have reached me lately from several of my readers, mostly in Ireland, of the difficulty they sometimes experience in obtaining "THE LONDON READER." I should esteem it a great personal favour if those of my readers who have been disappointed at any time will write to me giving the name of their newsagent. I will then see that such steps are taken to ensure their newsagent receiving a supply in future. I quite agree with *Amy and Mrs. W.*, that it must be a great disappointment to find themselves deprived of their favorite story paper, owing to the possible oversight of a newsagent. Might I suggest that the best way to secure regular delivery is to instruct your newsagent to supply you every week.

MAGGIE.—It is proper to present an engagement ring within a week or two after the parties have agreed to be married.

MARJORIE.—Clipping the eyelashes is inadvisable. It rarely stimulates the growth, and the fine, delicate ends are blunted, leaving the little fringe short and coarse and stubby.

NORA.—This hair tonic is recommended: One drachm of bisulphate of quinine, one-half ounce of tincture of cantharides, seven ounces of listerine. Apply to the scalp every night, rubbing briskly.

C. CHADWICK.—The superstition regarding the unluckiness of thirteen persons sitting together at a meal is supposed to have originated from the Last Supper of the Saviour and His Apostles, when just thirteen were present.

HOUSEMAID.—Here is a preparation which makes an excellent polish for linoleum: Scrape finely two ounces of beeswax, one ounce of white soap, one ounce of Castile soap, and pour over all a half-pint of boiling water. Stir till all is dissolved, let it boil again, take it off the fire and add half a pint of turpentine; then stir until quite cold. Apply with a piece of flannel, rubbing briskly.

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MOLLY.—It would be best for you to consult a solicitor in regard to the embezzled trust fund. After learning the facts, he will be able to inform you of the possibility of being able to force your "affectionate" cousin to disgorge their plunder.

VERA.—Flimsy silk that has gone into a multitude of age wrinkles may be smoothed out and restored to something like its original freshness by sponging it with gum arabic water. Sponge the right side of the silk, and when it is almost dry iron the wrong side.

VIOLET.—The injury to your knee is, I fear, more serious than you imagine. You should have consulted a physician at once. The increasing lameness should have prompted you to seek medical attention, instead of depending upon newspaper treatment. Delays in such cases are perilous.

KATHLEEN.—A simple gargle for a sore throat may be made as follows, and it will ease a troublesome cough: Pour half a tumbler of warm water over two tablespoonfuls of honey; stir until the honey is dissolved; add to this a wine-glassful of lemon juice, and stand the gargle aside till cold. It may be used freely.

NELLIE.—Orange blossoms are typical of purity, and are therefore considered suitable adornments for a bride who approaches the altar for the first time. Centuries ago they graced the brows of Saracen brides as emblems of fecundity. The Crusaders may have brought the fashion to Western Europe, but it did not prevail for many years. In the lapse of time the purity and remarkable sweetness of the orange blossoms have combined to make them favorites for the bridal wreath; and for this reason, without any consideration for the meaning of the original custom, they have been made the standard for bridal decorations.

JOSEPHINE.—The camel, in strength and endurance, is far superior to the horse. A horse in good condition will carry 250 pounds' weight over twenty-five miles of road in eight hours, while a camel will carry a weight of 1,000 pounds over twenty-five miles of desert daily for three days without eating or drinking. A horse succumbs in from four to five days without drinking. The camel begins work in its fourth year, and goes on increasing in strength and endurance for about fifty years, while the average of a horse's working life is sixteen.

MRS. HOPKINS.—To make hard soap, take 20 pounds of fat, 7 pounds of soda ash, 4 pounds of lime, 3½ buckets of water. Combine all together, and boil for three hours, frequently stirring it. Then pour it into a tub, and let stand until the next day. Then put it on the fire again, and when it begins to boil, add one pound of resin and half a pound of rock salt. When all are thoroughly combined, the soap is done. Put a little water in a tub, and pour the soap into it. In eight or ten hours it is ready to cut into pieces or bars. If left longer than ten hours it will be found too hard to cut easily.

W. W. COGROVE.—It is the lady's privilege, if so inclined, to first recognise and salute a gentleman upon next meeting him after being introduced. This prerogative is reserved to ladies, in order to protect them from annoyance; as in company, many casual introductions are made to persons with whom it may not be desirable to keep up an acquaintance. If the lady is disinclined to continue the acquaintance with persons so introduced, she will, of course, make no recognition upon next meeting. But if it should happen to be otherwise, she must take care not to omit the duty incumbent upon her, as politeness and etiquette debar the gentleman from making any advances.

PRUDENCE.—A tainted breath may be temporarily purified by chewing a bit of orris root or stick cinnamon. But this merely disguises the odour. A bad breath comes chiefly from decaying teeth, and in some cases has its origin in a disordered stomach. When diseased teeth cause impure breath, recourse should be had to a dentist; when organic disease is the cause, as is very often the case, a physician should be consulted. The breath should always be kept sweet, and people should guard against making themselves disagreeable to their associates by being indifferent in this matter. Many a woman, otherwise charming in every respect, has unwittingly repelled her acquaintances by her impure breath.

CATHERINE.—What is good for you is good for your friend: No external application will give you a fine complexion, and unless your digestive organs are in good condition, and your blood pure, the evidence of health will not be pictured in a smooth skin, rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes. You must be careful in your food. Avoid pies, pickles, warm bread or biscuits, heating condiments, and all indigestible mixtures. For a time at least eat only simple preparations, broiled steaks, roast meats or fowls, and palatable soups from which all grease has been removed. Be sure to have the larger portion of your meals comprise fruits and vegetables. Let your beverages be warm milk or weak tea, and beware of alcoholic stimulants.

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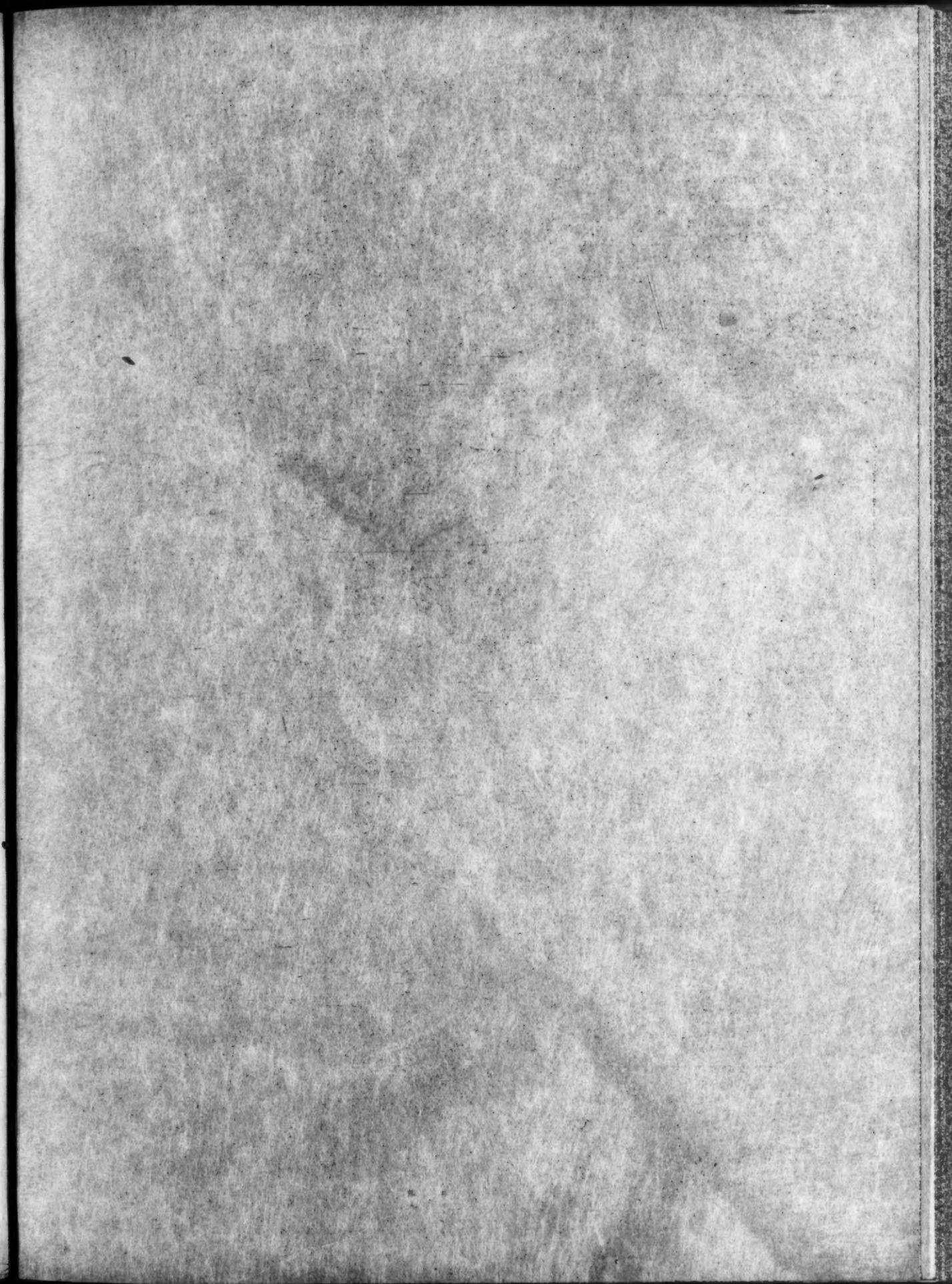
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